

TRADITION AND JAZZ



TRADITION AND JAZZ

BY
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Essay Index Reprint Series



BOOKS FOR LIBRARIES PRESS
FREEPORT, NEW YORK

814
P 3152

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER:
68-22937

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TRADITION AND JAZZ

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THE SHOT OF ACESTES

I

I REFER, of course, to the fifth book of the "Æneid" and the famous games at the tomb of Anchises. The races had been "pulled off," the boxing-bout was over, and the archery event was on. There were four entries: Hyrtacus Mnestheus, Eurytion, and Acestes—I will use only their sweater-numbers. The target was a mast from one of the defeated racing-boats or a fluttering dove tied to the masthead; the shooters could take their choice. The distance was not mentioned, but it was deemed ample. Admiral Æneas was sole judge and referee and distributor of prizes.

The shooting that followed was sensational. It

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was more: it was unique, for each of the contestants established a new record. No. 1, selecting the mast for his target, clove to a hair the very heart of it and instantly *ingenti sonuerunt omnia plausu*, or, translated into current United States, "the Teucric bleachers arose as one man and gave him the yell." A bull's-eye through the dead center—even the Sicilian townies could feel that. According to Vergil's record, No. 1 alone of all the four that day captured the crowd to the extent of a yell. No. 2 chose perforce the dove, but he would not kill the bird; he would not do a thing so ordinary as to shoot a tied dove. He aimed at the all but invisible string that bound the bird, and he cut it clean, freeing the captive, which instantly bounded into the sky. The bleachers sat in breathless silence and watched the joyous creature reveling in its new freedom. Then No. 3, holding his arrow on the taut string while he followed the bird in the air, at last let drive and pierced her amid the very clouds. Her life she left among the deathless stars, but her lifeless form restored the arrow to its owner's hand. Acestes's turn to shoot and no mark. All hope of

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prize-winning gone, he felt free to cut loose and shoot not for the crowd, but for the gods who ruled his soul. Lifting his eyes from the solid mast and from the mast-top, even from the low-lying cloud where had perished the dove, he drew his arrow to the head and did a thing no archer had ever dreamed of before: he launched his shaft with mighty arm straight into the Olympian blue where dwell the gods. And then—I'll leave the rich Latin, which no generation before mine would have insulted its readers by translating—the arrow, speeding swift among the thin clouds, burst into flame and, like a star unloosed from heaven, left behind it a long train of light.

The Trojan crowd, unable to fathom an unprecedented thing like that, sat in stolid silence awaiting the verdict of Æneas. They had not long to wait. To Acestes instantly he awarded first prize. As it runs in the swift Latin hexameters, he loaded the man with great gifts, and his temples he bound with the laurel of victors. To No. 3 he awarded the second prize, for had he not brought down the loosened dove from the lofty sky? To No. 2 went third honors, for by his skill had he not cut the

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bonds that held the wingèd one to earth? But to No. 1, the darling of the bleachers, the one of them all who had felt most certain of the rich prize, to him he gave no award at all, only bare mention that he also had shot, for what had he done but make a mere bull's-eye on the earth-rooted target?

II

Whether Vergil intended it or not, the thing is a parable. It rings true: it actually happened; it is happening every day. It clears one's thinking; it sets up standards of measurement: among men four attitudes toward life; in every contest four types of shooters; for critics four rules for determining values. Let us apply them to the modern novel, the worst tangle in modern literature.

Hyrtacus shoots always first; eternally he stands for the younger generation; eternally he opens the tournament, the new literary period—for "literary period" is always synonymous with "generation." He is the loudest of all the shooters; he is young, he is confident: cocksureness sits on him like a chip on a shoulder. Eternally he cries that the

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old is outgrown, rule-bound, moribund; that manner and manners have obscured the Truth; that he stands for Nature, NATURE! Young Alexander Pope cried aloud for "Nature" before Wordsworth was born. Hyrtacus stands on the solid earth and shoots at the solid mast—"Main Street," "Winesburg, Ohio," "Sister Carrie." He looks not up into the heavens: his business is with Life, the solid earth, the mainmast.

His slogan varies in form with every generation, with every decade even, but it never changes its substance. In the eighteen-eighties it was "realism," the realism of James and Howells—parlor realism; in the nineties it was "veritism," then "naturalism." There was young Frank Norris: "By God, I told them the Truth!" I hit the solid mast; I pierced the very heart of it. There was young Hamlin Garland: "I believe in the mighty pivotal present. I believe in the living and not the dead. Veritism deals with life face to face." And there was Eugène Véron, whom he quoted: "We care no longer for gods or heroes: we care for men." And behind them all Zola. Skip three decades: Dreiser, Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson

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—super-realism, stark-nakedism. Pick one at random to voice this new school of archery—Walter B. Pitkin, short-story coach, revamper of handbooks for correspondence courses, assembler of “As We Are,” 1923. Read his entire preface; this is a fragment:

It is partly a matter of scientific progress and partly one of intelligence level. Men read and write realism with a steadily growing passion as a consequence of the swiftly widening and deepening culture of this century. . . . The man who has been touched with the spirit of science puts little trust in his so-called “intuitions.” He suspects those moods which the poet calls “deep spiritual insights.” . . . In a word, he is a realist as every scientist must be, whether he knows it or not. Ours is the first generation in which there has lived more than a handful of realistically minded men and women. . . . Our popular magazines are responding to a firm demand for realism by printing stories which tell the truth and shame the devil as well as horrify the herd. . . . Our better magazines furnish realism in proportion to the numerical power of highly intelligent readers among their *clientèle*. So much for the general trend.

Thereupon he exemplifies “realism” by a series of tales so deadly faithful to the immediate con-

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tacts of life that some he declares are not fiction at all, but genuine biography, actual studies in actual back alleys, true to the minutest detail. He has held a clinic; he has made a dissection. You do not like such ghastly revelations? "Then we must debate this with you on the spot." You are belated in the march of evolution toward civilization; you are confessing your "lowbrowness"; the race evolves upward into realism. "If you want the proof of this, look at the history of our great literary successes."

I pick up a more recent book, "Midwest Portraits," studies in recent Chicago archery, "literature" as up to date as a city reporter's note-book. Everywhere life viewed objectively and microscopically. Every author of them a tireless worker in contemporaneousness; every one of them self-hypnotized in umbilical contemplation, obsessed with the immediate contacts of life—shooters at the mast. To a man they have been trained in the school of metropolitan journalism—superficiality, headlong impressionism. No perspective, no poise, no serenity of soul, no sky lights, no silences. In the words of the author

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himself: "In nearly all of them a realistic or naturalistic method predominates. The city, dealing with the elementals of our lives, inspires men to a realistic mood." Here is the list of our latter-day classics as crowned by Chicago journalism:

Theodore Dreiser in "Sister Carrie" and "The Financier," Robert Herrick in "The Web," "The Common Lot," and "The Memoirs of an American Citizen," Edgar Lee Masters in "Children of the Market Place" and "Skeeters Kirby," Henry Kitchell Webster in "An American Family," Joseph Medill Patterson in "Rebellion" and "A Little Brother of the Rich," Sherwood Anderson in "Marching Men" and "Winesburg, Ohio," Ben Hecht in "Erik Dorn," I. K. Friedman in "By Bread Alone," Hamlin Garland in "Rose of Dutcher's Coolly" and "A Daughter of the Middle Border," and Frank Norris in "The Pit."

I laid down the book, with its level atmosphere of contempt for "the old household gods whose engraved portraits hang on schoolhouse walls," its hydrophobic rage at the bare mention of "Puritanism," always made synonymous with "Comstockery" and "cant," its youthful cocksureness, and its inference on every page that now for the first

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time in all history a group of young men had arisen that was telling the truth about human life, the TRUTH!—I laid it down in the mood, I fancy, of the Man of Wrath in “Elizabeth and her German Garden”:

I very much like to hear you talk together. It is all so young and fresh what you think and what you believe, and not of the least consequence to any one.

Then suddenly a phrase on the jacket caught my eye and I got a thrill such as nothing in all the many chapters of the book had given me, a shock as from a live spark-plug: “These are figures of importance to their own generation.” Their own generation thinks these writings are literature; the outpourings of these Chicago candidates for the booby prize their own generation thinks are literature! What does it matter what my generation—the generation passing from the stage—thinks of these things? my generation does not own the next period, and these young men do. Can it be possible that a period is coming in the history of literature when the shot of Hyrtacus is to win the tournament? God help us!

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III

A tribe larger than that of Hyrtacus, though less noisy and far less cocksure, traces descent back to Mnestheus, No. 2 in the ancient contest. Sensation—to cut the unseen string and send the bird bounding into the sky—what a moment of thrill! Mnestheus shot only to capture the multitude and the prize. Always has there been sensationalism in the literary output of the world. Readers demand first of all newness, freshness, originality. To capture the multitude one must bring things new. A wild bit of newness like “The Castle of Otranto” has even created a new school of fiction. Sensation made a millionaire of Robert Bonner, editor of the “New York Ledger,” its star contributor Sylvanus Cobb. Sensation is the soul of the modern detective story, of the “dime novel” and the “shilling shocker,” of the O. Henry surprise ending, and of the noiseless clamor of the moving film. Mnestheus sits on every news-stand of to-day and at the gate of every moving-picture house, and puts upon all he touches the brand of third rate.

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But there was a second element in the shot of Mnestheus—sensation, the god of instants, is prolonged often into sentimentality. Sentiment—the wingèd thing helplessly fettered to earth set free, cast unharmed into the heavens, its element—what a stroke at the sensibilities! The arrow was kind; it was aimed not to kill, but to free. Sentimentality comes from self-pity; it comes from imagination which looks at the butterfly, winged for the heavens, sinking deeper in the mud with every stroke of its beautiful wings, and sees itself; it comes from conviction innate in some men, if not in all, that the great average of men is fundamentally good even as one believes oneself to be good. And the crowd forever delights to sit and watch the joy of the wingèd thing restored to its native sky; and sometimes, while watching absorbedly this creature of the skies buffeting the winds and surmounting the utmost cloud, it even forgets for a time that its own feet are on the muddy earth.

And sentimentality is weakness: it is rooted in selfishness. Mnestheus did not free the dove out of pity, but out of selfish desire. To rescue a

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starving kitten from a pit may be purest selfishness: "I couldn't sleep a wink to-night if I did n't." I wonder if the sentimentalism of the early nineteenth century did not prepare Germany for the debacle of the early twentieth. For sentimentality is selfishness, and selfishness is the very fountainhead of ambition and of cruelty.

I said sentimentality is weakness. I was reading lately Charles Godfrey Leland, a prophet of the mid-century, at present obscured almost totally by the underbrush. A book may be inexpressibly touching, he declared, it may be sunny and ingenious and yet be unhealthy:

Would you test what I have said? Read Sterne for an hour, and then take up some true old Roman or Greek poet who knew nothing of these latter-day sentimentalisms and fancies of feeling. How the wild boar's sides brush the dew from the leafy covert; how the violets spring freshly up to meet the sunlight on the mountain side; how the well-decked skiffs ride over the foam, while sea-nymphs look up through the blue waves. Ay, how flamens and lictors and solemn processions sweep through the columned streets of Rome; how the horses, with towering necks and slender legs, "haggard-browed, wide-mouthed, wide-nostrilled,"

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champ and foam; how the girl Erotion peers from the window at the sight:

"Her locks are tipped with ruddy gold
Like wool that clothes the Bacchic fold,
Like braided hair of girls of Rhine."

There is nothing that more irritates the vast tribe of Hyrtacians than this shot of Mnestheus. What chance does realism have, however skilful, in the presence of this stirring exhibition? And they jeer with a scorn that reveals the poverty of our language in really withering adjectives. "Pollyannaism!" "Dicky Davisism!" "Peruna!" they shout. "Syrupy treacle! Victorian gelatinousness!"—but I forbear. Their tribe is nothing new—even Mencken. At the very height of Victorian properness the English "Frazer's Magazine" could let out on Fenimore Cooper with, "He's a liar, a bilious braggart, a full jackass, an insect, a grub, and a reptile."

But when they condemn Mnestheus I am of the tribe of Hyrtacus both as touching the first fruit of his shot, sensation, and the second fruit of it as well—sentimentality. Of all debauchery that

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of emotion uncoupled with attendant action is the most deadening to the soul of man. William James in his "Psychology" has written most illuminatingly on the point. We remember his aristocrat who wept in the theater over the imaginary woes of the heroine while her own coachman was slowly freezing outside. And sensationalism—the freeing of the bird simply for the momentary thrill of it, again and yet again—is hardly less debauching. Go to the movies and look not at the screen but at the people. Purposeless watching for the cut string and the suddenly bounding bird, weltering in a smother of sentiment and leaving the dishes unwashed at home—castles in the air with no foundations at all upon the earth—continue it long and your soul, if you still have a soul, withers and dies.

But always Mnestheus wins over Hyrtacus. He caught at least a glimpse of the divine blue; he saw for a moment at least the loosened dove of man's soul mounting into the upper air, and for a moment at least he felt the freedom of the gods—he was himself a god, with all the boundless sky as his demesne.

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IV

The tribe of Eurytion is dubbed by D. H. Lawrence in his amazing book, "Classical American Literature," the "killers." With no thought of alluding to Vergil's parable, he has this of James Fenimore Cooper:

This is Natty, the white forerunner. A killer. As in "Deerslayer," he shoots the bird that flies in the high, high sky, so that the bird falls out of the invisible into the visible, dead; he symbolizes himself. He will bring the bird of the spirit out of the high air. He is the stoic killer of the old great life.

Good! It is a shot of Eurytion. Bliss Perry, also with no thought of his Vergil, has voiced the same thought:

Flaubert once compared our human idealism to the flight of a swallow; at one moment it is soaring towards the sunset, at the next moment some one shoots it and it tumbles into the mud with blood upon its glistening wings. The sudden poignant contrast between light, space, freedom, and the wounded, bleeding bird in the mud is the very essence of tragedy,

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There is "Don Quixote." Once men dreamed honestly of chivalry and tried to practise it and the whole race took a step in advance; then Cervantes shot the bird down into the barn-yard mud and we laugh and jeer. "No, no," you protest, "Cervantes shot only at the unspeakable nonsense into which the books of chivalry had degenerated, that nauseating mess of silly romances he so carefully enumerates. He did the race a benefit. His was a shot of Akestes." Not at all, and in saying it I am aware of the vast bulwarks of introduction and explanation and critical exegesis that have been thrown up around the volume by the commentations and critics of centuries. I will quote as typical Dr. John Ormsby:

Of all the absurdities that, thanks to poetry, will be repeated to the end of time, there is no greater one than saying that "Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away." In the first place there was no chivalry for him to smile away. Spain's chivalry had been dead for a century . . . What he did smile away was not chivalry but a degrading mockery of it.

But nevertheless the book falls inevitably into second place: it is a shot of Eurytion. The weak-

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ness of it lies in this: the old knight, unpractical to silliness, deluded, driven even to lunacy by the chaos of his reading, was nevertheless sincere. He set out in all honesty to be helpful to his fellow-men. He believed with his whole noble soul that he was righting wrongs; he had started out with purpose as serious as did any knight in the most golden age of chivalry. And he is made at every step a subject for hilarious laughter. Call him a fool, call him crazed by his reading, and laugh till your sides are sore over the hideous pummelings he received, but remember you are laughing at the overthrow of one who had ideals supremely above those of the Sancho Panza average of mankind; you are laughing at the defeat of all that is most precious in the sorry outfit of humanity. You are laughing at the defeat of your own soul. The old knight sees for instance a brute of a master beating to death his awkward servant, and, attempting, as any knightly soul would do, to rescue the victim, he is maimed and left half dead while the brutal master continues to finish to his satisfaction the job that has been interrupted. And Spain for centuries has laughed uproariously

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over the joke. May it not explain why Spain in three centuries since has produced scarcely one great book? Sancho Panza whose coarse feet are always flat upon the muddy earth is the real hero of "Don Quixote." He stands for common sense: keep your eye on your hogs, not on the sky. And Don Quixote, who, however crazily and by whatever crazed, had a vision of idealism, of life above the clod, and who without a thought of his own peril or his own sufferings plunged into the combat for what he believed to be for the helpfulness of his fellow-men, has been made the butt for the laughter of three centuries. "Don Quixote" has cheapened all that is best in humanity, for it has been read invariably for the laughter there is in it, the most of it at the expense of the simple old knight.

There have been plenty to follow in the footsteps of Cervantes: his book has been a model ever since. Satire is not always an inferior thing. There are abuses that will yield to no other weapon. Thackeray in "Vanity Fair" did not belittle human life: he belittled the English social conventions of a period. Swift, on the contrary,

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shot all the doves out of the human sky and left but the filthy Yahoo, compared with whom a horse is an angel of light. The apostle of disillusionment may have a message that to a degree is wholesome and necessary, but when he sets no limit to disillusion and takes from man all that has raised him in any way from the sty, he has become a menace to the race.

The past half-century has been peculiarly equipped with Eurytions, who seem to have had a kind of joy in shooting down everything that man has held peculiarly sacred. Could the Resurrection story of the New Testament be clearly proved by some new-found document or other to be absolutely false, there are those who would actually rejoice—George Moore, perhaps, whose "The Brook Kerith" was a shot to make the Christian world shudder. Anatole France in "L'île des Penguins" shoots down the old great life of France and sneers and jeers at the dead bird, and they give him the Nobel Prize for his marksmanship. The human soul takes as naturally to the upper air as the wingèd dove; it is incurably romantic and idealistic, and a Eurytion stands on every

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street-corner shooting at it as if it were an obscene bird. The American Mark Twain writes "Innocents Abroad" and shoots all the glory out of the romantic sky of the grand tour of Europe. His characters are "innocents" because they have been imposed upon: they thought there had been an old great life in Europe. He sends a Connecticut Yankee into King Arthur's court and we classify his book as humor. It belongs with the tragedies. He catches a glimpse of the old great life of the passing American frontier—romance with the golden light upon it; a glimpse he gets of the marvelous romance of Domremy and its peasant saint, and he dies growling curses on "the damned human race." America has produced no somberer tragedian. The Puritan tradition deals with one of the loftiest flights of the Anglo-Saxon soul, and no young archer to-day with arrow so blunt that he cannot bring it down into the mud. The typical Eurytion of the younger generation let us call James Cabell: life is tragedy; a glimpse of heaven and then a nose-dive into the dunghill dead. He writes the "comedy of disenchantment": let us rather call it tragedy, the supremest tragedy

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man knows. I mean Cabell is the tragedy. The man who sees no gods above his clouds is dead and in hell. Prometheus brought down from the Olympic zone fire for the blessing of mortals; Mnestheus also brought down a heavenly thing, but he brought it down dead—not fire, but ashes—and, having delivered the monstrous gift, he stands and sneers: “These are your gods, O Israel. Life is a monstrous joke: look at these dead ashes!”

Yet Eurytion is more deserving of the prize than Hyrtacus: he at least, if only for a moment, has looked higher than the muddy earth; he is more deserving than Mnestheus, for he did not stand impotently and dream of the skies. He brought down something out of the unseen, even though he brought it dead.

v

And now Acestes. His tribe is almost as small as that of the Mohicans. Novelists rarely have taken possession of domains so immaterial as those the imagination of Acestes bodied forth. These

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realms have most fully been explored by the poets. For one like Longfellow Aëstes would inevitably be a poet:

Where are the Poets, unto whom belong
The Olympian heights; whose singing shafts were sent
Straight to the mark, and not from bows half bent,
But with the utmost tension of the thong?

To him the literary master was the explorer of new seas, the extender of the domains of the human soul. His cry was for

a master of the art,
An admiral sailing the high seas of thought
Fearless and first, and steering with his fleet
For lands not yet laid down on any chart.

According to Poe, "The origin of poetry lies in a thirst for a wider Beauty than earth supplies. . . . Poetry itself is the imperfect effort to quench this immortal thirst by novel combinations of beautiful forms (collocations of forms) physical or spiritual, and that this thirst when even partially allayed—this sentiment when even feebly meeting response—produces emotions to which all other

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human emotions are vapid and insignificant.” To Poe this master of highest emotion, this Acestes, content only with contacts in the realms of gold, must be a creator, an idealist, a man of two worlds. Such masters are few: in selecting them he laid bare his own soul:

For one Fouqué there are fifty Molières. For one Angelo there are five hundred Jan Steens. For one Dickens there are five million Smolletts, Fieldings, Marryats, Arthurs, Cocktons, Bogtons and Frogtons.

Even one Acestes in a generation makes a people rich. America in her single literary century has had very few novelists who have ventured the supreme shot. Hawthorne has come the nearest to it. No man ever more fully paid the price of genius than he. For years he lived not on the solid earth, but in the upper air with his dreams. For a full quarter of his life he lived a hermit. Never once did he write *down* to the multitude, though not to do so made him even in his middle years “the obscurest man of letters in America.” And his “Scarlet Letter” was aimed wholly at the dictate of his own soul. We who read it to-day

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against the background of our modern life cannot realize what a shot of Acestes this was when it was first launched in puritanical mid-Victorian New England. To realize the full meaning of it one must project it against the background of the Boston of 1850. Cooper once or twice came near making the shot, but American democracy overwhelmed him and swallowed him up. A few other novelists there may have been, like Melville, who have caught glimpses of the Olympian summits but whose arms have been too weak to complete the shot. Others, not novelists, have been our Acestes shooters, alas too few: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman.

It is the gift of the supreme literary soul to see beyond eyesight, to bring the fire of the gods down alive. Standing with Acestes and looking into the invisible blue, one begins to understand many hard sayings of the philosophers. We catch a glimpse of what Melville meant when speaking of Hawthorne: "Irving is a grasshopper to him—putting the souls of the two men together." Irving was of the tribe of Mnestheus. We jeer no longer at Barrett Wendell's Harvard dictums: "The writ-

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ings of Irving, of Cooper, of Bryant never dealt with deeply significant matters," and, "In the work of Poe nothing was produced that touched seriously on God's eternities." And we understand Thoreau even in such Orphic sayings as: "We should see that our dreams are the solidest facts that we know," and, "My actual life is a fact, in view of which I have no occasion to congratulate myself; but for my faith and aspiration I have respect."

Great literature is always an arrow launched into the blue by an archer who sought no prize save that furnished by his own soul, who followed no precedents, but who shot to bring down alive the unseen powers, call them gods or call them what you will. Novalis sought the blue flower; Maeterlinck, the blue bird; and they sought it not in the mud of the swamps. Thoreau had lost among other things a dove with wings. His dream was "to discover the sources of the Nile, perchance the Mountains of the Moon." Never was he a naturalist: rather was he a super-naturalist.

Always somewhere in the great classic comes the stage-direction, often implied, "Enter the gods."

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The arrow kindles in the sky and becomes a trail of light for generations to come. Melville wrote "Moby Dick" to suit his own imperious soul, and two generations later its trail was burning brighter than when he first shot it. Whitman, not the earlier poet of the body but the later voice of the soul, created his splendid "Passage to India" out of his own life without models and without expectation of reward or recognition. Thoreau for years wrote his journal daily for himself and the gods. He had no thought of publication. Emerson's most quoted line is "hitch your wagon to a star," and he holds the commanding place that he does to-day simply because his whole life long he tried for himself to make this celestial connection.

There are those who fear that Acestes is dead and that in America at least he has left no descendants. After reading a book like "Midwest Portraits" one is inclined to agree with them. But if Acestes is dead then is the soul of America dead. Inconceivable! The Cabells and the Andersons and the Dreisers and the Menckens rule the moment by their clatter and their cocksureness, but their day is brief. A donkey braying in the back

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lot may drown for me the music of the spheres—if I will let it. These creatures of the moment have as little power to realize the possibilities and the harmonies and the wingèd powers of the human soul, its ability to triumph over the merely physical, compelling as the physical unquestionably is, as they have to wear the shoes of St. Francis. They see but the mud and they bathe in the mud and they cry to the world: "Come on in; the mud is fine. Everybody's in it. Look, here is a sample of it, warranted genuine. You can't stay out anyway, even if you want to." But Acestes looks away from the mud and talks of the glory of man. His eyes are upon the gods beyond the clouds, and when he shoots, his mighty arrow becomes a burning pathway across the heavens lighting the race in its groping progress upwards toward the stars.

THE ARS POETICA AND SCOFFLAW POETRY

I

FOR an adjective descriptive of the present moment of our civilization one finds the dictionary useless: one must turn to the newspapers. The old English language codified by Dr. Johnson in the leisurely eighteenth century when seven-volume novels were all too short and by Worcester and by Noah Webster in the unhurried early nineteenth breaks down completely under the modern strain. To define the age now in terms of "rag-time" and "jazz" is to be no longer "up to date." We have advanced. Perhaps Professor Sherman's phrase, the age of "swift mobility," describes a dominant phase of it. Certainly it is the age that demands velocity—anywhither, it matters not, if there be but velocity. We "joy-ride" till we "razz" our nerves and then we seek to rest our-

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selves in the "movies." Speed compels laws—speed laws; but laws were for the slower eras of mankind. We are impatient of laws: laws slow us down. Speed has become a mania: on all the highways now maniacs. "The race of life has become intense," wrote Carlyle a hundred years ago. "Woe to him who stops to tie his shoestrings." But Carlyle was visualizing an age on foot. To-day we talk familiarly of sixty miles an hour—and "better." The race of life has become intense: he gets left now who stops to read the speeding signs. It is the "scofflaw" age. The virus has entered everything—our business, our pleasure, our literature, e'en our devotion.

To avoid destruction in the streets now one must be conscious of the "islands" of refuge which have been erected in the whirlpool of the traffic. Ten months of the modern "razzing" of nerves and brain I can endure, ten months of "scofflaw" poetry and swiftly mobilized novels, then I must break for an "island" of safety from the traffic and restore my balance; every June I flee for my life to a little Sabine villa in the deeps of the New Hampshire Rockies, and there, while the dog-star rages

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and the cicada rules the noon, I get back by slow degrees to the world I once knew. Speed is impossible on my Sabine hill, the movies are far away in the valley town, and the radio has as yet unvexed the stillness of my rural night. And in the weeks that follow I rediscover the old foundations, I review again the unchangeable definitions, and I restore my soul.

I have a shelf of restoratives, the most of them old, all of them strong, but for first aid I fly always to a jar of old Falernian "boot-legged" by Eugene Field. Rome, it seems, "razzed" at times even old Horace in his far day: he too had to escape for his life when dog-days came. Here's Eugene's version of it:

Dame Fortune plays me many a prank,
When she is kind, Oh how I go it!
But if again she's harsh,—why then
I am a very proper poet!
When favoring gales bring in my ships,
I hie to Rome and live in clover;
Elsewise I steer my ship out here
And anchor till the storm blows over.
Compulsory virtue is the charm
Of life upon the Sabine farm!

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Rather free with old Horace—a shocking translation to build one's hope on if one is cramming for the mid-year's—but I wonder if it does not convey, as no literal translation ever possibly could do, the feeling and the atmosphere it conveyed to old Mæcenas and the Roman "intelligentsia" in those days of its first newness when the Eternal City was changing from brick to marble. Just where does the Horace cease and the Eugene Field begin?

The evil planets have combined
To make the weather hot and hotter;
By parboiled streams the shepherd dreams
Vainly of ice cream soda water.
And meanwhile you, defying heat,
With patriotic ardor ponder
On what old Rome essays at home,
And what the heathen do out yonder.
Mæcenas, no such vain alarm
Disturbs the quiet of this farm.

Field is faring very well for an American poet dead for a generation, better I am inclined to believe than is Riley. I wonder if a state assembly can ever legislate a verse-maker into a classic by

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making his birthday forever a holiday. Sincerely I hope so: we have an abundance of legislatures. But old Eugene is holding his own very well even without the benefit of legalistic enactment. Single-handed he erected "columning" into a recognized literary art, but the best things he ever did were these hilarious rompings with old Horace. I always read the book straight through the first day of my Sabine farming, and the fever flickers and dies into gentleness, the jazz band within me ceases its jungle-beat, the sodden realism that has invaded even my religion dissolves noiselessly into that mellow atmosphere of art for which there is but a single descriptive adjective—Horatian.

Hark you! from yonder Sabine farm
Echo the songs of long ago,
With power to soothe and grace to charm
What ills humanity may know;
With that sweet music in the air,
'T is Love and Summer everywhere.

Ah, Eugene, I'm better already.

But the whimsical young Chicago Horace is only first aid among my restoratives. There is

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old Quintus Horatius himself in the stout original meters, a begrimed and dog-eared text from college days, coverless and thumbled within an inch of its life, the survivor of more hard readings than ever I have given any other volume secular. It is to be opened at random—*sortes Horatii*—

Ehu fugaces, Posthume, Posthume,
Labuntur anni, nec pietas moram
Rugis—

Ah, the sheer poetry of it! Translate it not at all; poetry dies in translation and becomes mere words, philology, the deadest of all the sciences. All that is really poetry evaporates the moment you change a single word in it. Apples can be translated into apple-sauce without the loss of a scruple of physical substance, but they cease instantly and forever to be apples. To one who knows seek-no-further and winesaps and Mackintosh reds in all their primal beauty and their glory of aroma, the apple-sauce translation, however fond one may be of apple-sauce, is total destruction. Sauce is science; and apples, their bloom

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and their aroma still upon them, are poetry—sheer poetry.

And then on the shelf, within easy range of my hand, is my Vergil, my old leather Cooper's edition, stained and fringed most deeply at the Georgics and the Bucolics; and there is old Izaak's deathless tome, and Sir Thomas Browne's, which opens of itself now at "Hydriotaphia"—oh, it is a goodly company those twenty undamaged souls on their shelf shorter by half than the famous Harvard bibliotheke. But that first day of my restoring, that glorious day "when over parched Apulia the dog-star broods," I dedicate to old Horace. To those who love him not, amen to his own curse: "May they eat garlic!" yea may they eat the utter garlic of the Spoon River swamps, "more deadly than the hemlock." And the dusk creeps on as I read, and gently the darkness.

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
Ut prisca gens mortalium,
Paterna rura bobus exercet suis
Solutus omni fenore—

Ah, poetry is poetry; the years but mellow it and add to its beauty and its healing-power. It is too

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dark to read now. I close the old volume and go out into the sweet-breathed night, the glorious summer night that is vocal precisely as it was in those far boyhood days when everything in life was poetry. And I fill my lungs deep and lift my eyes to the southern sky where the heat-lightning flickers noiseless, and then to the summer heavens. And the old north star is still there: it has not changed one hair's breadth since first I knew it, nor the cluster of the Pleiades nor the belt of Orion. The old world is with us even yet. Some things even in this last welter of days are precisely as they were—even before the war; some things are eternal yet and unchanging. The laws—even the laws for the making of verses—are not fashioned anew for us every day. The great fundamental laws are unchanging and forever.

II

American poetry began with Horace, at least it began with a glorious lover of the old bard. Philip Freneau caught his first glimpse of the meaning of poetry in his college days at Princeton before

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the war had changed for him the whole world, and it was chiefly Vergil and Horace who gave it. And for him the vision was so glorious and so compelling that through a long life in an age devoid of art and crude beyond all belief he never completely lost it. The vitriol Freneau poured upon Benedict Arnold when he heard the traitor had escaped was of Horace's own distilling:

Mala soluta navis exit alite
Ferens olentem Mævium—

With evil omens from the harbor sails
The ill fated ship that worthless Arnold bears,
God of the southern winds, call up thy gales
And whistle in rude fury round his ears.

With horrid waves insult his vessel's sides,
And may the east wind on a leeward shore
Her cables snap, while she in tumult rides,
And shatter into shivers every oar—

And so on through twenty quivering lines, faithful utterly to the fierce Horatian model and to the demands of poetic and of nautical technique. Longfellow, it will be remembered, was considered for the new chair at Bowdoin College because an

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examiner once heard his exquisite rendering of an Horatian ode.

But to follow the trail of this old classic through all the maze of our American poetry is not my object at all. Let me say that he has touched every poet—until recently; and then let me ask if the modern literary influenza that has distorted and hoarsened and crippled our current poetry be not the result of the decay of the classics in our schools and out of them. A “scofflaw” race of verse-makers is among us who know not Horace’s art nor the exquisite beauty of his workmanship, who sneer at authority and abominate the elder poets, and who make their own laws as the whim of the moment dictates.

Poetry, says Horace, was “created and invented for the delight of our souls.” It is for healing, for refreshment, for the restoring of the beauties and harmonies of life. In his “Ars Poetica” he deals for the most part with the major forms of poetry, the epic and the drama, but to lyric song he allots also no small domain: “To celebrate the gods, and the sons of gods, and the victorious wrestler, and the steed foremost in the race, and the inclina-

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tions of youth, and the free joys of wine, the muse has allotted the lyre." Only those themes, therefore, worthy the gods and the sons of gods are fit subjects for lyric song: the world of man's loftiest ideals and strivings; a belief in the gods and the Olympian heights to which man may climb; the joys of victory over the sullen physical forces—the hour of triumph that exalts men to the order of Sons of the Gods; the ecstasies and the dreams of youthful love that can even transport man out of the realm of selfish seeking; and the exhilaration of wine that lifts, be it but for a moment, the wretched realism of the daily round into the glory of Olympus itself—these are the subjects of lyric song. With the lyre of the poet in his hand man soars out of the Spoon River mud into the infinite blue. No longer is he the creature of failure and of ignoble ending: with the lyre in his hand man becomes a god. And the lyric, says Horace, must be beautiful and melodious and clad in "pomp and splendor of diction." Nor is this all: "It is not enough that poems be beautiful: let them be tender and affecting and bear away the

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soul of the auditor whithersoever they please." Note the word "auditor." Thus old Horace.

American poetry of the last two decades has run increasingly to the lyric. Our younger poets are living life in swift dashes. They have no patience and no powers for long-sustained effort. They dash headlong from whim to whim. Unquestionably the reading public is greatly to blame. Life to-day is excited and tumultuous; it takes its fiction in concentrated boluses and its poetry in exotic tidbits and batik bon-bons. The epic, as poetry, is moribund if not already dead. For a brief Indian summer at the opening of the last century, at the call of Scott and Southey and Byron and others, it burst seemingly into vigor and beauty, but the first volume of the Waverley Novels ended its short November. To-day the epic is written in prose—or worse; and its Homer is O. Henry. And the poetic drama has all but left us. It has been driven from the stage into the closet, and in the closet it is now gasping near to death for want of air. So few care to read it that it can be published only at its author's ex-

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pense. Soon it will be rated among the extinct literary forms. It died hard, this poetic drama. The Victorians made heroic attempts to hold it on the heights of its glorious tradition. Tennyson and Longfellow, to cite no others, gave each of them his ripest period to the tragic muse—all in vain.

The new era is lyric, and lyricism fundamentally is sheer egotism. The epic is objective—we forget the poet; the drama, though to less degree, is also objective: who has found Shakspeare in Shakspeare's plays? But the lyrist is subjective, else is he not a lyrist at all. "Hear me!" he cries. "Hear *me*—ME! Behold how I joy, I hate, I sorrow, I love, I revel in beauty!" It is an age of unbridled individualism as never before; and lyric poetry of all the arts, is the most individualistic. The lyrist has no secrets: he talks interminably about himself. It is the age of universal autobiography now, and the lyric is pure autobiography. The lyre preëminently is the instrument of youth: upon it youth may give expression to the fierce urges and longings and dreams and excitements of ado-

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lescence. And youth is lawless, contemptuous of old forms, impulsive, impatient of guidance. Always has it been thus. It rushes in—and then looks: always has it been thus, but until recently it has been held with firm hand and disciplined and ruled. Now it is encouraged in its lawlessness. It was for the holding of youth to rule, for their discipline, that Horace wrote his deathless epistle which we call the “Ars Poetica.” He waxes sarcastic in his earnestness: “Those who do not understand the game do not rush headlong and untrained into the Campus Martius, yet he who knows nothing of verses presumes to compose: why not? He is free-born, and comes of a noble family?”

Why not, indeed? Why not free verse—verse free of *all* rules? Because, rules Horace, poetry is an art—the finest of the arts—with laws and technique that centuries have worked out, exact and exacting, laws that have not changed since Grecian days and old Aristotle. The commandments are more than ten, but this is Horace’s first demand; this is Lesson I in the “Ars Poetica”:

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If ever you write any poetry, let it be submitted to the ears of Metius, who is a judge, and then to your father's and to mine [note that the appeal is to the ear: it is to be read aloud three times]; then let it be suppressed till the ninth year, your papers being laid up within your own custody. You will have it in your power then to blot out what you have not made public: a word once sent abroad can never return.

This rule alone is enough to place old Horace in the van of the world's great lawgivers. Were the rule enforced, the quantity of our American verse would become vastly less, but would there be less of poetry?

III

Few of this younger generation of verse-makers have I admitted to my Sabine area, "my woodlands and my little farm that restore me to myself"; not one of them as yet. Suppose for my healing I take with me this summer some of those very recent volumes that Miss Monroe and Miss Lowell so zealously recommend. Which shall it be? I will measure with the staff of William Watson:

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'T is human fortune's happiest height to be
A spirit melodious, lucid, poised, and whole;
Second in order of felicity,
To walk with such a soul.

What soul among these poets of the latter day can walk with me my Sabine silences and be for me "melodious, lucid, poised, and whole"?

Poetry I never take on recommendation, even the recommendation of friends whose tastes I know and approve. Poetry is an intimate personal affair that one must settle with oneself. The astonishing volume of propaganda and explanation of the "new poetry," now none of it over two decades old, angers me though I read it only by title. I read very little indeed *about* poetry, but patiently I sample considerable of the poetry itself, though I feel at the start that I shall not like it. Poetry, like all other delicate vintages, should be "cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth"; and much of it, I feel convinced, should never be disinterred. Raw, new poetry just off the rack necessarily is tart and puckery and bouquetless. So is every original newness—and everything was a newness once. One must cultivate a taste

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even for the old Falernian and Cæcuban—certainly for new. What we like and what we dislike is largely a matter of habit. It is possible that in the course of several lifetimes devoted to nothing else I should come to admire even cubist and futurist “art.” If the new poetry charms me at any time by its mellowness and smoothness and beauty, instantly I suspect it of being the counterfeit of some old brand. All varieties of poetry were new once and had to make their way against fierce antagonism.

I think often when I am about to condemn a new poet how like new persimmon wine John Keats must have tasted to Jeffrey with his fine old palate for Scotch well aged, and how smoother than curds this same John Keats lingered on the tongues of the next generation. Fresh romantic poetry just off the press has always a savage tang to the classic Jeffrey of the generation just before. New-made cider, pressed from no matter what exotic apples, cannot satisfy the palate tempered to the bouquet of old champagne. I remember the annihilating retort that trembled on my tongue one day in the first “Spoon River Anthology” year when a college

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sophomore in all seriousness asked me to recommend for his reading three or four books of "this new roughneck poetry that has got a kick in it." The retort died unsaid, for it flashed upon me that perhaps I was standing just where old Jeffrey's generation had stood when Keats was the new "roughneck" poet, Keats the hostler's boy, washer of gallipots for a chemist, and breaker of all the rules of Pope. Who am I to condemn the classics of the future simply because they do not fit my pint-pot? I gave him a full list, and I sent for them all for myself and read them diligently and with great fear, that insidious fear which comes to every man slipping past middle age when he hears the voice across the street shrilling, "Beaver!" and has a ghastly suspicion that it may be directed at him. So I constantly have struggled through the romantic tangle from "The Congo" to "Doctor Mohawk," and from "Cornhuskers" to "Slabs of the Sunburnt West." I said "romantic tangle"; yesterday I found a new definition of "romanticism": "Anything that disturbs violently the equilibrium of the intellect." It enlightened me.

Which of all these multitudinous volumes is

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most likely to become a permanent addition to the poetry of the world? "There is more of the great authentic classic tradition in the *Spoon River Anthology* than in the *Idylls of the King*, *Balaustion's Adventure*, and *Sohrab and Rustum* combined"; this from Miss Monroe. And I had thought of adding *Sohrab and Rustum* to my shelf. "The *furore* with which the book ["*Spoon River Anthology*"] was received is unprecedented in the annals of American poetry"; this from Miss Lowell. Very well, I will make the "Anthology" a candidate for my shelf, to be lived with year after year for the restoring of my soul. But first as to the *furore* of its first reception: why mention that? I remember a statement by Poe, who was both a poet and a true critic: "The popularity of a book is *prima facie* evidence of the book's *demerit*, inasmuch as it shows a 'stooping to conquer'—inasmuch as it shows that the author has dealt largely, if not altogether, in matters which are susceptible of appreciation by the mass of mankind—by uneducated thought—by uncultivated state, by unrefined and unguided passions." Choose you your guide,—Miss Lowell or Poe? I

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open the Spoon River Classic at random as I did my Horace:

A. D. BLOOD

If you in the village think that my work was a good one,
Who closed the saloons and stopped all playing at cards
And haled old Daisy Fraser before Justice Arnett,
In many a crusade to purge the people of sin;
Why do you let the milliner's daughter Dora,
And the worthless son of Benjamin Pantier
Nightly make my grave their unholy pillow?

This is good comedy undoubtedly, but is it a poem? "Comedy," observes Horace, "is believed to require the least pains, because it fetches its subjects from common life." It is not poetry: poetry dies in the low atmosphere in which vulgar comedy flourishes. Shakspeare uniformly put such people and such passages into prose. It has not the atmosphere, the "feel," the harmonies, the beauty of poetry. It is removed from "Sohrab and Rostum" by the whole diameter of the circle. The atmosphere of the "Spoon River Anthology" is the atmosphere of the rural county court-room, where life at last becomes but an endless succession of rape cases; it is sordid from cover to cover,

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and poetry forever is a thing of beauty. It may be lucid, but it is not melodious, poised, or whole.

And as to its form, and rhythm, and general poetic effect: Suppose you were entering a room where this was being read aloud and you had never heard of it before, what would you think was being read—poetry?—the Russell Lowell test. Poetry cannot be made of realism; poetry is not a thing of scientific truth, of biologic findings, of moron criminal records. How long would sculpture endure should we insist on absolute realism: were we to use as models the skeleton-legged, diseased, and cadaverous creatures actually to be found in every hospital and every county jail? Great art looks to find the possible perfect in our human life. In the imperfect, even the grossly imperfect which are all about us, we may discern the almost obliterated perfect pattern toward which it is cowardice and crime for us not to strive.

In fiber of mind and in sense of art Masters is not a poet at all. Everything he has done, save the "Spoon River Anthology," is feeble stuff, and the "Anthology" is not poetry. I dismiss him utterly from even the foot-hills of Parnassus.

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Poetry may be pessimistic, even erotic, but it must not be revolting: "Let not Medea murder her sons before the people, nor the execrable Atreus openly dress human entrails." The book is of short-story texture: these fragments obey all the rules of the latest handbooks. Often they are fitted with surprise endings after the O. Henry models. How short can a short story be? asked "Life" not long ago and paid well for the answer. And the answer was right here in the "Spoon River Anthology": as short as "A. D. Blood." These essentially are short stories, prose epic fragments, the débris of an exploded realistic novel or depressed prose epic—anything you may wish but poetry. And I say it after having read every word of it—even through the "Spooniad" and beyond that into "The Domesday Book,"—

Ah, many a cup of old Cæcuban now
Must drown the memory of that insolence.

But what matters it whether the book be classified as poetry or prose if it has—as it undoubtedly has—power, if it be book enough to create a literary *furore*, if it can hold its place for a decade?

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Does it matter what name we call our literary products? Tremendously it matters. Poetry is poetry, and no matter what may become of the rest of the literary domain this must be kept sacred and apart. One area there must be unprofaned by realism and science, an area with but a single vista and that toward the perfect. The women of our colonial period, forced to live amid the squalor and the unspeakable ugliness of the frontier, fenced off in the wilderness one tiny garden in which they planted the old-time flowers whose seeds they had kept as their most precious possession. No vulgar weed there, no useful cabbage or rutabaga in that hallowed domain. It was their only area of beauty in a land that smeared its coarse thumb over the very soul. Poetry forever is a thing apart—"not a pursuit but a passion"—a vision of the glory of the perfect in a world where nothing is perfect. When Coleridge declared that the antonym of *poetry* is *science* and that the immediate object of poetry is never the truth, he meant realism, he meant *Spoonriverism*. No. The "Anthology" can never

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rest on my Sabine shelf where broods the Spirit of healing and of recreating power.

After Masters I hear most often of Sandburg. "The supreme poet thus far of the twentieth century"; that only yesterday, and from a critic who has been listened to. "Slabs of the Sunburnt West"; on the very surface of it I find sensationalism, a deliberate straining for the uncouth—"Slabs"; I find lugged-in tawdriness—"Sunburnt" (the West is no more essentially sunburnt than the East); I find catering to provincialism—"West." Join these characteristics with plus-marks and you have the chemical formula for Sandburg.

Hog butcher for the world—

Sandburg soared into fame on that single line like a witch on a broomstick. It was so brutal, so realistic, so Spoonriverish. It slapped poetry in the face and the world gasped—or rather the little world of the "intelligentsia" gasped. The world went right on reading Edgar Guest totally unaware that any one was gasping or needed to gasp. Democratic poetry, the poetry of the

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bourgeoisie, the poetry of the American jungle stripped to the waist and gloriously begrimed—at last poetry for the people who had never read poetry before because it was so beruffled, so “over-appareled,” so archaic in diction and chained to forms outworn, so undemocratic—but only the aristocracy of letters read a bit of it, and a few college professors and book-reviewers. The people went right on reading Edgar Guest. Miss Lowell and Miss Monroe and Louis Untermeyer and the rest of the circle shouted that the Aonian Mount had been scaled at last and charted and measured, and wrote treatises learnedly expounding it, and made anthologies, but the mass who knew not the meaning of “’neath” and “demesne,” the mass for whom poetry had been freed, went right on oblivious with their Edgar Guest or their comic supplement. Free verse when their eye rested upon it appeared to them as something freakish, like futurist art.

When Abraham Lincoln was shovelled into the tombs—the cool tombs—

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Sensation plus prettiness. Abraham Lincoln was not shovelled by any stretch either of realism or pessimism or poetic exaggeration. Everywhere in Sandburg strain—a straining for the arresting, the shockingly uncouth, the incongruous grouping of extremes, and scattered barbarously through it all silly paper bouquets—a slaughter-pen bedecked with chintz lilacs and hollyhocks and flannel tea-roses. To invite Sandburg for a weekend at the Sabine farm—he would use my Horace for shaving-paper.

But still there are Lindsay and Miss Lowell and Robinson and Frost and Sara Teasdale. What has Vachel Lindsay for my Sabine shelf? Nothing that touches me at all on the side of the poetic as I define poetry. Laureate of the saxophone age; inspired jongleur for the barbecue following a hippopotamus hunt on the Congo—and it was only that I might escape the tom-toms that I have sought this Sabine villa. “The Chinese Nightingale”?—not for me. The collocation of the two words is criticism enough. It tells all. I feel that old Horace foresaw Lindsay and gave

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counsel that has come down safely through two millenniums. To young Vachel Musena he wrote this: "Prudently contract your sails, which are apt to be too much swollen in a prosperous gale."

But what of poetry east of this Illinois "School"? The leader first, Miss Lowell—in-ebriated in her prose with superlatives and unwise in the choice of her favorites; worshipping at the shrine of Keats and at the same time showering American beauty roses upon the gross anti-Keatses of the Chicago jungle. When she ceases to explain and to classify and to crystal-read the future of American poetry; when she ceases *invita Minerva* to sing feminine bass in the Masters-Sandburg-Lindsay-Lowell quartet; when she forgets, if ever she can forget, that she is leading the forlorn hope of a new poetic era; when she sings in her natural voice, spontaneously sings—when she does all this she is a poet, and there are lyrics in her portfolio that Horace would approve—strains, "alas, too few."

Robinson I must read again—I have hopes—and Sara Teasdale with her Sapphics I feel sure might have gained audience even in more spa-

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cious days. And Frost, too, the most genuine of soul of them all, a real poet fallen on evil times. The soul of the "Georgics" is in some of his bucolic stanzas, but for me he lacks melodiousness all too often, and poise, and that inspired breath of poetry no one may define. Not one of these poets, I am forced to say it, not one of them all, is fit yet to associate even remotely with my Sabine few—not yet. It is only recently that I have admitted Longfellow—the Longfellow of the Sonnets.

IV

The last decade of our poetic history has been the decade of talk about poetic form—and such an avalanche of talk of poets about themselves! It was Lowell, I think—James Russell—who remarked of Poe that he talked

like a book of iambs and pentameters,
In a way to make people of common-sense damn metres.

And the "new poetry" in the same way has talked

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itself moribund chiefly concerning fantastic technique. "Free verse," "*vers libre*," which we are assured is not the same thing, "impressionism," "imagism," "symbolism," "polyphonic prose," "exteriority," "concretism," "hokku forms"—people of common-sense certainly are near the explosion-point. "To have good sense," declared Horace, "is the first principle and fountain of writing well"; rare old Horace! Few stickle as to form if there really be moving beauty and genuine emotion in the poem. But the freedom implied in the term "free verse" has run away with the new poets and taken with it much of their good sense. When mere strangeness and exotic experiment become the leading aim of poets, the poetry of the period is on the decline. And one has only to glance at American poetry now to be impressed by the amazing strangeness of much of it. There is no uniformity of agreement: every book has its own brand of strangeness. Let me quote from the latest collection of verses that has come to my attention, a "lyric" which has been praised by a recent reviewer for "its exquisite precision and delicacy":

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of evident invisibles
exquisite the hovering
at the dark portals
of hurt girl eyes
sincere with wonder
a poise a wounding
a beautiful suppression
the accurate boy mouth
now droops the faun head
now the intimate flower dreams
of parted lips
dim upon the syrinx.

Primarily it is for the eye—its abandonment of capital letters and punctuation, its couplets and singles grouped with no reference to the sense, its whimsical line length. But what does it say when it is read aloud? What does it yield of sense even after one has puzzled over it? "It is n't necessary to know exactly what this means to find pleasure in reading," remarks another young reviewer of another recent batik effusion, and then he adds, "which is one way of defining poetry." One way, indeed.

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And it is "poets" and critics like these who are damning now the "gelatinous Victorians," who are dismissing with contemptuous pity Longfellow from the realms poetic—the "mushy," "parlor-poet" Longfellow, who chuckle in derision at the "over-appareled art of Tennyson," and who view the sonnet as American school-teachers on the grand tour view the thumbscrews and racks and boots of the Inquisition.

It is useless to refute them; it is waste of time to argue with them. I take down my little volume of Longfellow's sonnets and open at random as I did my Horace—the lament for Agassiz:

I stand again on the familiar shore,
And hear the waves of the distracted sea
Piteously calling and lamenting thee,
And waiting restless at thy cottage door.
The rocks, the sea-weed on the ocean floor,
The willows in the meadow, and the free
Wild winds of the Atlantic welcome me;
Then why shouldst thou be dead and come no more?
Ah, why shouldst thou be dead, when common men
Are busy with their trivial affairs,
Having and holding? Why, when thou hast read
Nature's mysterious manuscript, and then

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Wast ready to reveal the truth it bears,
Why art thou silent? Why shouldst thou be dead?

Lay it beside the one quoted above; there needs no other word. It was stretched on the rack of the sonnet, but where does it fall short? What has been dragged in perforce? At what point does it violate the new poetry decalogue? There are no merely literary words, nothing merely decorative, nothing not simple enough to read to a child, and certainly it deals with a subject within the sphere of every man.

He who complains of the cramping chains of the sonnet, and flies simply for relief to the "loose-fingered chords" of free verse, lays bare thereby his own poetic leanness. If one has the imperious urge of poetry in one's soul one can make even free verse compellingly poetic. Poetry is emotion; "an emotional delight," to use Aristotle's definition. It is the sole object of the poet to create in his reader or his hearer the ideal, the emotion, the beauty that are in his own soul. And inevitably and instantly must it chord and be understood or it has failed.

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The new group that a decade ago I viewed with such extravagant hopes seems to be on the whole a failure. It has talked itself to death; it has touched the fatal pitch of realism and has befouled its wings. A few lyrics Time may single out, but I fear it will be few indeed. The great choir of vers-librists with their myriad songs like falling leaves in autumn has been for the most part mediocre in voice and emotion. Fatal word, for, says old Horace in lines that bite like fire even after the centuries: "Take this truth along with you and remember it. . . . A mediocrity in poets neither gods nor men have endured. As discordant music, and muddy perfume, and poppies mixed with Sardinian honey give offense . . . so poetry, created and invented for the delight of our souls, even if it comes short ever so little of the summit, sinks to the bottom."

OLD IZAAK WALTON AND THE JAZZ AGE

I

MOST potent, perhaps, of all the restoratives on my Sabine farm whither I flee when the city rage too fiercely has possessed my soul is old Izaak's deathless tome. I read him an hour; then I wander in reminiscent mood, the book face down and my hands clasped behind my head; then I go rummaging for my fishing-tackle, a whole year unused. To read Horace renders me human: the old rascal makes no apology for his worldliness; he lives with heartiness, and he hates and loves and conceals nothing; he soothes me with melodies artfully combined; he leads me into landscaped beauty where perchance there are nymphs and where surely there are laughing-eyed maidens; and he makes me feel the mellowness and the rich-

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ness and the patrician charm of those unhurried days

When sunny Flaccus sang the Roman noon.

But when I read "The Complete Angler" I am led into the unlandscaped out-of-doors and under the open sky; I am led, I know not by what magic, into self-forgetfulness: I am in the heart of Old England, in meadows that seem always to have been meadows, in a springtime that seems eternal and unchanging; and I follow the winding river through banks of cowslips and mary-buds, by hamlets half hidden in the trees and into little Elizabethan inns until I feel as if I had blundered by a miracle of good fortune into the land where were laid the idyls of the Georgics and the Bucolics—a land as far off from the jazz and the scofflaw roar as the demesne old Homer rules is removed from the banks of Spoon River. But best of all I find as I read a living man, genuine and transparent as his own trout-pools, simple-hearted as the rustics he finds in his own spring meadows, and wholesome withal and hearty and human as even old Roman Horace himself. There is no art,

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no conscious effort, in "The Complete Angler," yet what perfect artistry. It reveals the man. We know him; we walk with him with all confidence, for he is self-contained, he is sincere. Had but a single leaf of his little book reached our generation we still should know him better than we know the enormously bewritten sovereigns under whom he reigned. Indeed, is there anybody we know more completely than we know this simple old catcher of fish who babbles by the April brook-sides and confides to us the secrets of his craft?

How guileless he is, how hearty, how completely lovable! Contemplate a sentence like this: "I love all anglers; they are such honest, civil, quiet men." Or, again, this: "No life, my honest scholar, no life so happy and so pleasant as the life of a well-governed angler; for when the lawyer is swallowed up with business, and the statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on cowslip banks, hear the birds sing, and possess ourselves in as much quietness as these silent silver streams, which we now see glide so quietly by us." Or yet again, this amazingly unmodern account of

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the origin of his book: "I sat quietly by a calm river and contemplated what I shall now relate to you." Of the Rev. Dr. Nowel, located by the date 1550, I know absolutely nothing save what old Izaak has recorded: "He was observed to spend one tenth part of his time in angling, and a tenth part of his revenues and usually all of his fish amongst the poor." What more need one know? Biography enough for any man.

II

I grow a philosopher in my second hour with the old angler. He gives me data with which to reconstruct my world after the cyclone of my city winter. His pages clear the atmosphere, they reclassify humanity, they reveal like a touchstone true metal in one's friends. According to old Izaak, a day by the brook-side or on the bosom of a summer lake or sluggish river will open to you more of the soul of a man than a year in the chaos of the city mart. And it is true. Take the man out fishing before you make him a confidant or a partner or a husband. If he goes with you willingly and joyously

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and skilfully you have learned much at the very start. He has passed the initial classification.

For any man beyond the days of boyhood to confess that he loves at times to steal away to the lake or the mountain stream to fish for a day or a week tells far more than at first would seem. It separates the man from the mighty tribe of the hunters, the men of action and noise. "Hunting is a game for princes and noble persons"—for autocrats, rules Sir Izaak. It lends itself to pomp and display. Men, like wolves, are wont to hunt in packs, and often in a manner so boisterous and so worldly that the early church placed its ban upon every variety of venatorial dissipation. "The ancient ecclesiastical canons shall find hunting to be forbidden to churchmen as being a turbulent, toilsome, perplexing recreation." It is fitted for kaisers and medieval kings, and for hard-riding and hoarse-shouting Squire Westerns. Loudness may accompany the chase, but never is it permitted the angle. Old Izaak could even maintain that all true fishermen "forbear swearing lest they be heard and catch no fish." The very presence of an angle, he contended, breeds patience and gen-

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tleness and serenity of soul. But not so with the hunters. Chaucer's Monk, the loud and worldly old rascal,

Gaf nat of that text a pulled hen
That seith that hunters be nat hooley men.

And he lived accordingly, as the text shows.

Nimrod, first of all the world's mighty hunters, became at last the father of those that build cities—Babel—Babylon—confusion of tongues, roar and rush, marts and money-changers, sensation and sin. Delirium is of the city, and the city was begotten of Nimrod, the mighty hunter before Jehovah. The modern Rooseveltic of soul—strenuous, headlong, combative—pause in their rounds of "big business," politics, trust-building, "trust-busting," empire-planning, and plunge into African jungles to hunt elephants; or they gallop with savage shoutings behind their trained wolf-packs, or they wing with roaring guns the humbler woodcock and pheasant. A kaiser in a day can butcher enough deer, driven to him down guarded runways, to load a dozen horse-carts with carcasses.

Nimrod was a mighty hunter before Jehovah of

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the Old Testament. The Jehovah of the Pentateuch was no fisherman. From Genesis to Malachi, indeed, there are no anglers. The Old Testament is a book of mighty hunters, of barbaric tribes on the move, of early nations swept into exile, of primitive rages and primordial fury—a roaring book of wars and the aftermath of wars. But the New Testament centers about peaceful fishermen: it is the Gospel of gentleness and love. Four fishermen, observes old Izaak, “have a priority of nomination in the catalogue of the twelve Apostles—St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James and St. John.” “He never reproved these for their employment or calling, as he did scribes and money-changers. He found that the hearts of such men by nature were fitted of contemplation and quietness; men of mild, and sweet, and peaceable spirits, as indeed most anglers are: these men our blessed Saviour . . . chose to call from their irreprovable employment of fishing, and gave them grace to be his disciples, and to follow him and do wonders; I say four of the twelve.” They were to be the heralds of his new kingdom. In the roaring and screaming and blood-drenched evolution of the

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race the angler comes last of all, and he rules by the very gentleness of his soul. The hunter and the warrior pass, but he abides. The world becomes his; the meek inherit the earth, or, as the sweet-souled old angler phrases it: "As I thus sat, joying in my own happy condition, and pitying this poor rich man who owned this and many other pleasant groves and meadows about me, I did thankfully remember that my Saviour said that the meek possess the earth; or rather, they enjoy what the others possess and enjoy not; for anglers, and meek, quiet-spirited men are free from those high, those restless thoughts, which corrode the sweets of life."

The temple of real contentment then the bloody Davids never build, and the rich man never enters, it is alone for those few who are Waltonian of soul. Wealth makes not for contemplation; wealth is not bred of quietness; it seeks not at all the still waters and the lonely lakes and the thick alders of the meadow stream. Old Walton dismissed it utterly in one vitriolic sentence: "Men of sour complexion, money-getting men, men that spend all their time, first in getting, and next in

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anxious care to keep it; men that are condemned to be rich—we anglers pity them perfectly.” And another class there was that he pitied as completely: those snobbishly rich in mere intellect to the dwarfing of their souls, men rich in artistic bric-à-brac, over-civilized men, esthètes, reformers on furious hobbies. Who can imagine Dr. Johnson angling in a mountain stream—Dr. Johnson obsessed with the urban, contemptuous of wild nature: “Sir, he who is sick of London is sick of life”? Walton, to be sure, he admired, but not for his “Angler”; it was for the piety of the man, and his life of Donne. The secret of the man he never guessed: he had nothing within himself with which to measure it. To him it was amazing “that Walton, who was in a very low situation in life, should have been familiarly received by so many great men.” And who can imagine Carlyle dedicating a book “in memory of the happy days we have passed together by the riverside”? Or Matthew Arnold, Hellenistic of soul, supercilious, critical; or Byron, egocentric, sensuous, nihilistic—after me the deluge; or Oscar Wilde, whose crowning horror was to be left alone in Reading

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Gaol where contemplation was forced upon him? In the "honest brotherhood of the angle" there are no John the Baptists shouting, "O generation of vipers!" "We anglers all love one another." Indeed, he cannot even quote briefly the opinion of a friend without a gentle tribute: "Old Oliver Henley, now with God, a noted fisher both for trout and salmon." How little life needed of riches on "a fine fresh May morning" when the sun was just rising, and all the meadow was "checkered with water-lilies and lady-smocks," when the trout were biting sharp, and the chubs; and just beyond was the clean and comfortable inn, where might be had "a good honest, wholesome, hungry breakfast!" "Ribbons, and looking-glasses, and nut-crackers, and fiddles, and hobby-horses, and gimcracks, and all the other finnim-bruns that make a complete county fair—Lord! how many things there are in this world" of which Izaak Walton had no need! He lived his whole life long in the simple day, enjoying it in the beauty of quietness, thankful to Him who "gives flowers and rivers, and stomachs, and meat, and content, and leisure to go a-fishing."

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III

Washington Irving, as he tells us in his "Sketch-Book," got from "The Complete Angler" the inevitable reaction: it set him first into enjoyment, then into philosophic contemplation, and then into headlong action. He bought a complete outfit and plunged off to the mountain brooks a-fishing. Horace induces a mood, but he urges to no outcome; Izaak Walton creates a mood and then an eagerness to do. The final results always are worth recording: they reveal the man. Nothing else in all "The Sketch-Book" more completely lays bare the soul of Washington Irving than the outcome of his angling adventure. Wild nature was no more for him than it was for any of the eighteenth-century men. Patient toiling long continued was not in his make-up, nor roughing it, nor the loneliness of the mountain stream. He preferred the city, the mellow glow of old days as seen through the pages of antique volumes dusty but mellow. He left the stream and spent the day over Walton's "Angler." Goldsmith would have done the same: the author of "The History

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of Animated Nature" could not possibly have angled, though he might have discoursed most charmingly on the possibilities of Lake Windermere, for shark-fishing. It is utterly impossible to imagine Dr. Johnson as angling, even indeed as sitting on a rock and bobbing for whales. The eighteenth century was urban with a contempt for the raw out-of-doors.

Before the first week is over at my Sabine farm I am off with my fishing-gear, old Izaak face down on my desk. Whether I strike through the pastures to the chattering trout-streams or over the ridge to the lily-ponds or down to the sluggish river I shall not say. It would classify me completely, for a man is known by the fish in his creel and the waters in which he angles. There are anglers and anglers. There are catchers of trout, and there are catchers of tarpon, and they are different. The trout sends one to the mountain stream in the excitement of an April day, when the woods are vocal and the pools are alive with the burbling waters. And the trout is there, alive and eager, but beware! Nothing in nature is so wary or so sensitive. The slightest jar of bank

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or hint of shadow on the pool, and the monarch of the stream is not yours—only fingerlings. One moves with velvet foot, one flings with utter accuracy—no bungling here—his fly through the tangle above the one spot possible, and if all has been perfect there is a flash, a strike that thrills you as if the line had been touched by an electric spark, and then, if you are master of the moment, there is thrashing on the moss beside you a trout that in beauty nothing in the seven seas can equal. Is this your fish? Then I know *you*.

Or it may be the pike that calls you when the summer days lengthen and the pickerel-weed begins to shoot its purple spikes. He leads you to the still waters of the northern lakes, to the lily-cove, hedged in by alder-tangles and fringed with swamp-lands. Push your boat into this narrow cove, thick with sagittaria and pickerel-weed. The surface, save here and there a black pool, vibrant with water-skaters and flashed over by dragon-flies, is spread with lily-pads the size of your hand, and among them scattered thick the waxy bloom of the cow lily and the miraculous nymphæa, most fragrant of all the northern flora.

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Here's an open pool amid the tangle, with deep water beyond. Stand at the bow now, and cast your minnowed hook just clear of the lily-pads, or bait with a bit of frog and trail it along the top of the water beyond the yellow bladder-wort tangle. Again. Yet again. A swirl! a fierce lunge that breaks the surface like a subterranean or subaqueous eruption, and the tiger of the northern lakes has your hook. An impudent slap of his tail as he wheels for the deep water, and he has disappeared seemingly with all your tackle. Do not strike. Hold still! The tiger has his quarry. He must shake it, gulp it, swallow it, and with it perchance the hook. Rare judgment now. The experienced paddler behind you counsels coolly, "Not yet! wait for him!" It seems an hour, those two minutes; then the excited whisper, "Strike!" Ah! the whole pool is alive now: "Look sharp! Lead him from the pads!" Careful, now—no bungling! Now he is in the net, now he is in the boat. "Three pounds?—five pounds if he is an ounce." What a mouth! what fiendish cruelty of teeth; what savage colors in that tawny tiger hide, what clean-cut lines; what lithe feline ability to

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flash death through all that watery jungle that he ruled! Is this your fish? Does your soul cry out in the summer-time for the lonesome coves, with the dragon-flies and the laughing loons, and the pickerel-weed?

Or it may be the salmon, or the lake-trout, or it may be the battling bass. To love the black bass of the blue-watered lakes and northern rivers is to be in a class unique, for the bass himself is unique. To woo him is like wooing the feminine. One can never be sure of him—or shall I say *her*? To-day she may rise in numbers to May flies thrown anywhere upon her whole domain; to-morrow not all the flies of Egypt could induce a single one to seek the surface. Everything you may offer she will spurn save perhaps striped frogs; a day later and she may take but grasshoppers, and that only in the morning. By afternoon she may have a taste for hellgrammites. Then for days she may seem to eat nothing at all. Invariably when bass fishers meet it is, "What are they biting to-day?" Every possible lure the fisherman must have, and patiently must he try them all. But the price is worth the toil. When once the bass has struck

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there comes the most dramatic period that the angler ever knows. Only half the time is the fighting fish in the water. He leaps a quivering atom high in air; he plunges in wild runs to the length of the line, then heads back like a flash for the boat. A tangled line, and you have lost him. He is right under you. Sharp! Sharp! You've lost him! No! No! He has leaped clean of the water, so near you that he has splattered you from head to foot: and he is shaking the hook from his mouth. No slack line! Reel, reel, for your life! Reel! Six pounds if he is an ounce! He is off again! Ten rods, twenty rods! He is coming again! Sharp! quick there, paddler; no slack now, you man at the bow reeling like mad. He's heading for the boat! The man with the paddle must be as skilful even as the man with the rod, and he must handle the net, too. Five fierce minutes, and you have him. He is pounding the boat bottom, and you know what the war-hoop meant to the brave who had just scalped his foe. Is this your fish?

I know a man who will not angle for bass because the plucky little fish fights so desperately

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and so intelligently against odds that are twenty to one. For two grown men armed with perfection of apparatus to fight in absolute safety an enemy which weighs five pounds is to him not sportsmanship. His fish is the tarpon of the Florida reefs. With a rod that is a mere reed, and a line that's but a thread, he will fight a fish that is his own size, and a fish that in fierceness and agility and brute power is a bass multiplied by twenty and by more. There is danger in it. The boat is a cockle-shell on the vastness of the ocean, and the tarpon may lead straight out to sea, he may upset the boat and angler at any moment, he may tire him out and drag him under. Rare skill one must possess for that elemental fight, and endurance, and a dogged "hang" that never lets go till the line breaks or the fish is dead. Peculiar type this angler for tarpons.

His antonym is the fisher for the lazy pout or the chub, or other breeds of porky fish that are caught by fishers on banks or in boats, patient waiters hour after hour, with no thought of "playing" their fish when at last he comes; content, to use the parlance of the tribe, simply to "derrick

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him out." Hour after hour they sit in seeming vacuous stupor, stagnant as the waters in which they fish. These are the members of the craft that lay it open to the charge of "shiftlessness." Your fisherman is your true idle man, your vagrant from duty, your lazy loafer who sits all day on the bank, and catches but a minnow or a sun fish. Shame on him! One of Beecher's "Star Papers" was entitled "The Morals of Fishing." But some of the rarest souls that have ever lived among men have loved at times to sit all day long on a bank or in a boat, and simply fish. President Grover Cleveland was one, and Cleveland's administration is growing in importance with every year now. Perhaps they came not at all for fish. The rod and the creel and the bait-box were but the excuse that they gave the carping world. They fish for a contented soul, for philosophic calm, for a day "without offense to God or man," the peace that comes only from the running brooks:

Complete content: the day has brought it;
He fished for pleasure and he caught it.

Thoreau angled for the pond itself. The only souls, he observed, who ever came out to spend

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the whole day on the Walden shores came as fishermen. It was only the boys who came for the fish alone; they were in the hunter stage. They might go there a thousand times, perhaps, "before the sediment of fishing would sink to the bottom and leave their purpose pure—before they began to angle for the pond itself."

Is one, then, a lazy man who loves hour after hour to sit in the silence of a summer evening serenaded by batrachians with banjos and tuba basses and quavering solos, startled now and then by the boom of the bittern, or the bowstring twang of the night-jar, and his raucous "Perk! perk!" as he arises from his dizzy nose-dive? On the south the heat-lightning plays fitfully, and in the perfect stillness seems like the ghost of the distant storm. What fitter time and place for contemplation? Says old Izaak, "the very sitting by the river's side is not only the fittest place for contemplation, but will invite an angler to it." Many a sermon was planned in a boat; many a first, and secondly, and thirdly, far from all thoughts of rod and fish. And then would come a sudden tug at the line that was forgotten. It would make one jump like

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a hand thrust from the`dark. Is there no joy in that?

Thoreau fished at midnight and caught the mystic soul that lay in the deeps of his Walden pond. No one has ever written so illuminatingly as he upon the transcendentalism of fishing and all the mystic lure of it. I cannot forbear quoting the entire passage. No true angler but will feel a response in his soul:

Sometimes I spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat by moonlight, serenaded by owls and foxes, and hearing, from time to time, the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand. These experiences were very memorable and valuable to me—anchored in forty feet of water, and twenty or thirty yards from the shore, surrounded sometimes by thousands of small perch and shiners, dimpling the surface with their tails in the moonlight, and communicating with a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes which had their dwelling forty feet below, or sometimes dragging sixty feet of line about the pond as I drifted in the gentle night breeze, now and then feeling a slight vibration along it indicative of some life prowling about its extremity, of dull uncertain, blundering purpose there, and slow to make up its mind. At length you slowly raise, pulling hard overhand, some horned pout squeaking and squirming to the upper air. It was very queer,

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especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams, and to link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook.

Were I writing a book on piscatorial art, a chapter there should be on night fishing, and I should entitle it perhaps "The Transcendental Angler." No fishing more rare, no catches so rich, as those made in the darkness. It was only after he had fished all night that Simon cried out, "It is the Lord!" The Bible Dictionary, dwelling upon the serene and mystic nature of St. John, remarks that "the occupation of a fisherman was adapted to promote holy meditation, since it would frequently lead him to pass whole nights in stillness on the water."

And I said before I sought my Sabine acres that contemplation is now dead, that America has no time for the quiet life, that the age of jazz and Marathon dancing and "movies" had killed without possibility the ancient art of meditation. Now

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I know there is a remedy, a revival of the glorious art of angling. Thoreau would advise sending bankrupts not to the debtor's prison, but a-fishing. "A man runs down, fails, loses self-respect, and goes a-fishing though he were never seen on the river before. Yet methinks misfortune is good for him." Has one an impulse to throw it all over and end the game? Let him go a-fishing. Is the world upside down? A day in a boat on the still waters of a pond will restore the balance. As one sits in one's boat in the stillness of the summer day or on the bank while the sluggish stream steals by, the values of life change their face. Literary values change as by magic. The best sellers one seldom thinks of on the open lake with the bittern booming far away and the frog voices faintly heard from the distant coves. One would not take Vachel Lindsay to read in a boat while fishing on a lily-pad lake in the mountains, or "The Spoon River Anthology," or Sandburg. The tribe of the Sandburgians do not go a-fishing: they talk of the sunburned West while they sit in Chicago. What a gust of laughter from the "hard-boiled" "scoff-law" school of new poets, should they see an Edgar

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Guest volume in the boat—Edgar Guest the “gelatinous Victorian,” the hypermoral, Peruna-taking, puritanic, Polyannna-echoing Edgar Guest. But Edgar Guest fits a boat on a mountain lake in a long summer day better than any other of the modern poets.

A feller is n't plotting schemes
 Out fishin';
He's only busy with his dreams,
 Out fishin'.
His livery is a coat of tan,
His creed—to do the best he can;
A feller's always mostly man,
 Out fishin'.

Not that I advise taking Edgar Guest. If one is to read in one's boat, let the book be old—old Izaak best of all. To be curled up on the stern seat of a country-made boat far away from any signs of man, rocked gently with the summer swell of the lake while one's line is overboard forgotten save as some sudden tug makes one's heart miss a beat, and losing oneself in the old angler's philosophy—it is a day in one's life that one will remember in times to come. The old angler in the contemplation of his later years called up from

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the past only "such days and times as I have laid aside business and gone a-fishing with honest Nat and R. Roe, but they are gone, and with them most of my pleasant hours." Many things we need to-day, but most of all we need anglers. The text of Walton's book is the text of all that the world to-day most needs: I Thessalonians iv, "Study to be quiet," for it is become the age of jazz and there is no time left for contemplation.

IV

There are other and finer lines of cleavage. I am philosopher indeed after a session with old Izaak. Anglers are known by the bait they use. A friend of mine, on whipping a mountain stream one day in May, was shown the full creel of a passing angler. Still can I see the curl of his lip: "Caught with worms!" He himself had caught nothing, but he had not tried yet all the flies on his hat. To him angling was not a mere vulgar pursuit of pounds of fish: to him it was an art. How often old Izaak speaks of his "art": "Angling is an art: is it not an art to deceive a trout

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with an artificial fly?—a trout! that is more sharp-sighted than any hawk?” And as he waxed enthusiastic over his blending of curious raw materials into his masterly flies and lures, Venator interrupted him: “You talk like an artist!” he cried. To be sure he did. He was doubly an artist: he created with Nature as his model his work of art; and in casting it with precision and with a verisimilitude that deceived even the creature best acquainted with the action of flies upon a stream, he became again an artist, one even of rarest type.

The torture of worms and frogs and insects has troubled many a sensitive fisherman. The old Angler Armstrong, 1496, had met many even in his far barbarous day who had had misgivings as they impaled the writhing worm upon the steel, but he had never been troubled himself: “His life is pure that wears no fouler stain.” Old Izaak’s dictum that when stringing a frog upon your hook you should “use him as though you loved him,” has often been quoted to show his tenderness and humanity. Foolishness, indeed! There was nothing squeamish about this hardened

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old angler. He followed his advice swiftly with this: "that is, harm him as little as you may possibly, that he may live the longer." The very refinement of cruelty, you say, yet to old Izaak angling with a live frog was the surest way to pass one's time "without offense to God or man."

To the possessor of a New England conscience the artificial fly is a balm. "I make my own flies," my sensitive-souled neighbor tells me with huge satisfaction. "I pit my skill against the professional skill of the mountain trout. It is an even thing: if he takes my fly I have no pity. If I cannot deceive him I do not deserve him. Let him go." On wild howling nights in January, when the snow is piled to the window-sills, and the streams are solid to the bottom, he will sit hour after hour fabricating his flies for the spring fishing. And he has a joy in it keener, it may be, than he will have while casting those flies by and by in the chatter of the May brooks. "It remains unresolved," muses old Izaak, "whether the happiness of man in this world doth consist more in contemplation or action."

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v

And here comes the great question: what after all is the real source of the angler's love for his angling? I sit sometimes and seek to analyze the urge that comes surging over me always in early April or May when I hear the wild geese at night honking on their northern flight, and the brooks begin to run clear, and the fishing-tackle is displayed in the shop windows. It is akin to the wanderlust that sends the tramp out upon the spring highways, and keeps him moving on and on he knows not where, nor cares. Oliver, my next neighbor, dismisses the question with a cocksure sentence: "It is only one phase of the eternal hope of man to get something for nothing. You throw your hook into a pool that is not yours, and perhaps you will pull out a prize that the whole town will talk about—something for nothing." Oliver plays golf. To him, as to Venator, angling is a "heavy, contemptible, dull recreation." Once he quoted in high glee a passage he found in Denny's "Port Folio" of 1812:

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Whilst thou with hooks the silly fish doth kill,
Perchance the devil's hook sticks in *thy* gill.

And again he blundered on this in old Leigh Hunt and kept me reminded of it a whole week in early May: "We really cannot see what equanimity there is in jerking a lacerated carp out of the water by the jaws, merely because it has not the power of making a noise; for we presume that the most philosophic of anglers would hardly delight in catching shrieking fish." It gave him a new turn to his philosophy: the savage hunting-instinct is imbedded in every human being, and the angler is the mollycoddle among the destroyers. A wounded rabbit may cry like a frightened baby; a dying deer has almost human eyes. Fish are mere things: they cry not, and they have no expression in their eyes. Hence the supersensitive may kill them without qualms. He talked an hour. Then I asked him if a single one of Leigh Hunt's long row of books was still in print.

I have another friend who bases the joy of the angler upon the element of mystery that lies in the depths his eyes cannot plumb, and in the hope that "springs eternal in the human breast." The

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angler faces ever the marvelous possibilities of the stream or the lake—

I would I could know
What lieth below
When the tide comes in
On the length and the breadth of the marvellous
marshes of Glynn—

and facing the mystery, imagination awakes. The next cast—what monster of the deep may not arise then? Old Izaak, his imagination kindled by his glimpse of the fish that has just escaped, wonders if he may not be perhaps “a fellow to the great trout that is nearly an ell long, which was of such a length and depth that he had his picture drawn and is now to be seen at Mine Host Ricabie’s, at the George in Ware.” The angler is your true idealist, he maintains; he is your real romanticist—all anglers are romanticists, and utter optimists. The best is yet to be; the next pool holds the king of the stream. Experience is swallowed perpetually by hope: “We have toiled all night and caught nothing—nevertheless.” All their lives these fishermen had dreamed of a draft of great fishes until the net broke, and never had they had

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it; nevertheless— And to the glory of human life the miraculous draft of fishes came.

And it is this element which the fisherman has riper and richer than other men have, my friend contends—he is a preacher and an old one—that makes life, after all, worth the living. It is not what we get, but what we expect to get that makes life rich. Heaven is a necessity of the race. Without a good time coming, a golden age to be, a week perhaps on the lakes or in the woods, a possible prize after the toil and sweat, who would care to live at all? When one has lost his illusions he is dead. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy" because everything ahead seems good; there is a fresh new joy around every turn of the road. Picture the boy, fish-pole in hand, as he steals up to the dark pool where "big ones" are known to lie. There may be no rise after all his casting: but what of that? He goes away muttering: "To-morrow he'll bite. And down by the bridge there's an old whaler." To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new. And that night he dreams of whales. Is that not living?

Suppose glasses were invented that would enable

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one to penetrate the water as clearly as the air. Would it not strike a blow at the joy of the angler? Here is one who in ecstasy of expectation has angled all day at the deep pool: what if he had known the truth? Simple Simon fished with tremulous eagerness and infinite hope in his mother's pail. They called him simple, but it was only because *they* knew what was in the pail. Is the angler at the deep fish-forsaken pool any less simple? "I have known a very good fisher angle diligently four or six hours for a river carp," observes old Izaak, "and not have a bite." Had he known it, perhaps, there was not a river-carp within half a mile of where he fished. But he went home resolved to fish the same waters again the next day. Who after all is not a Simple Simon? We are all of us Simple Simons, fishing blindly in fishless waters. The fishing is good, yet glorious, for it is not the fish that brings the joy of the fishing; it is the expectation.

"Did n't you know it is wicked, son, to catch fish on Sunday?" asks the parson of the small boy on the bridge, eagerly watching his bob and line in the water below.

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"Who's catching any fish?" comes the reply. Surely the mere joy of the fishing broke not the Sabbath day. O. Henry found in life but a single real pleasure unalloyed: he wondered what lay around the next corner. Life except for the very aged is humdrum in retrospect. A recent book bears the title, "Tragic Fishing Moments." Angling as seen in retrospect is usually a tragic thing: wet feet, a probable cold in the head, big fish lost just at the boat-side, tackle smashed at the critical moment, nights of toil with no miraculous draft at the daybreak; but in prospect angling forever is joyous. Luck will surely come with the next trip, or the next cast: that is the very essence of fishing, and it is the very essence of life itself. Thus my old preacher.

But is not the joy of the angler the joy that comes from reverting to the primitive? My friend Ackerman says so. To shake off the artificial fetters that have bound us hand and foot, and for a day or a week to get into the forest again and to match one's wits against the wild life that ages ago it was death not to capture—is that not

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the fundamental lure? Savage instincts lie very close to the surface of life even in its most civilized areas. The primeval brute within us is always ready to awake and seize the lead and impel us toward the raw and the red areas of Nature. Thoreau at the sight of the fleeing woodchuck felt a wild impulse to rush after it and kill it and devour it raw. To capture from a wild stream a fighting trout by one's own effort and skill, and to cook it and eat it in the woods, yields a barbaric joy all the more keen because of its distance from the civilized world that has become so completely the master of our thoughts. I like to note the primitive exultation of old Izaak over a captured trout. "The very shape and the enameled color of him hath been such as hath joyed me to look on him."

Then there is the element of the love of wild nature which some have supposed is a modern delight. Nothing could be more contrary to fact. Your fisherman has always been a lover of the wild. How much of the charm of "The Complete Angler" comes from the atmosphere of meadow

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and stream and flowers and "smoaking showers" that lays over it. It is always May in Izaak Walton.

In one of the oldest of all books on angling, the "Treatyse on Fysshynge," 1496, there is much concerning the charm of Nature, and the joy of life in the open, merry and virtuous, gentle and free, which causes a long and happy life:

Atte the leest his holsom walke, and mery at his ease, a sweet ayre of the sweet savours of the meede floures that makyth him hungry; he hereth the melodyous harmony of foules; he seeth the yonge swannes, heerons, duckes, cotes and many other foules, wyth their brodes; whych me seemyth better than all the noyse of houndys, the blastes of hornys, and the cryes of foulis, that hunteters, fawkeners and fowlers can make. And if the angler take fysshe, surely then is there no man merrier than he is in his spyryte.

Then, too, there is a peculiar social element in angling that one does not find elsewhere. The *bonhomie* of the old fisherman at his inn beyond the meadow with Venator and the honest anglers, who, like him, delighted to pass the evening reliving the day they had passed on the stream, is a

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quality unique with the craft. There are fishermen who practise their art with fullest delight only when accompanied by congenial souls. Their cup of joy is full when after a successful day they gather about the camp-fire and tell their jolly tales of monster fish that struck and were not hooked, that smashed the tackle and escaped, or that came to net after a grilling fight and broke all local records; and then perhaps they talk long of flies and lures and tricks of the art. There are those who prefer the solitude of a boat with a single companion. Thoreau would sit in perfect enjoyment all day with his old angler friend and scarce say ten words. Others grow reminiscent as the still hours go by, and open up their lives. Silent men grow voluble, and voluble men wax silent. Would you *know* your neighbor, sit with him for a day in a boat fishing in quiet waters. He is indeed a *rara avis* among mortal men who prefers to do his angling alone—"a wild beast or a god." A man all by himself fights a monster trout for twenty minutes—all by himself—and wins. What for? Thoreau kept a masterpiece of a journal for himself and the gods, but there are a few men now in

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the world who can take joy in bringing forth a perfect piece of art with no thought of gallery or bleachers or even of a woman looking on. Even old Izaak had not climbed to the supreme height to which it is possible for anglers to climb. Angling for him was an art tedious and long to learn, but when he had mastered it he loved an audience. He played constantly upon his green-horn disciple's wonder. He lectured to him with a "campus cocksureness," and he showed off before him with adolescent zest. Venator, wholly out of luck, is inclined to lay the fault to his tackle; old Izaak exchanges rods and continues to catch fish after fish. Venator fails to land his trout; old Izaak assures him that had he held the rod the trout would now be on the bank. His sole ambition he declared was "to be the best in the art." "I envy nobody but him, and him only that catches more fish than I do." He loves to be liberal with his fish, to distribute of the fruit of his skill to those whose skill was less. There is joy in it, to be sure, but to Thoreau it was not the highest joy. There is something selfish, something barbarous, in it. To him the string of fish

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displayed with pride was but the relic of the savage in man, an animal instinct that one should outgrow with his adolescence.

And finally there is the fish-story, synonym for all the creations of Ananias. One goes fishing, declares my cynical friend, to stimulate one's imagination. I grant it: would that more went. Imagination to-day is dying in this movie-cursed western world, if it be not entirely dead. "Death to the optic nerve," demanded Stevenson, but to-day the optic nerve is carrying the whole burden of our civilization. Realism is the demand now, "the god of things as they are," God's truth, veritism, naturalism, nakedism. Imagination dies. In the moving-picture house everything is done for you. Everywhere in the world now the grind of the moving-picture camera. You see wild animals moving in the jungle, great men in action at critical moments, accidents, prize-fights, battles, executions, shipwrecks; the world is grown *blasé*, it has seen everything. But your angler is still a true romanticist. He works not with his eyes; he is of imagination all compact. What is that boy thinking of as he digs up so early the garden

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worms? What does the fly-fisher see when he casts his hackle upon the black pool? And the fish-story is not a lie in the least. Mark Twain was not a liar; he was a glorious romanticist. I think Joseph Baldwin, writing his "Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi," when Mark Twain was a mere cub pilot on the river, must have foreseen the later Clemens. Describing Ovid Bolus, he declared that

He lied from the delight of invention and the charm of fictitious narrative. Lying came from his greatness of soul and his comprehensiveness of mind. The truth was too small for him. Fact was too dry and commonplace for the fervor of his genius. His world was not the hard, workday world the groundlings live in: he moved in a sphere of poetry: he lived amidst the ideal and the romantic. There was nothing narrow about his lying. It was as wide and illimitable, as elastic and variable as the air he spent in giving it expression. It was a generous, gentlemanly, whole-souled faculty. He was strikingly handsome. There was something in his air and bearing almost princely. His manners were winning; his address frank, cordial and flowing.

Clemens was your true fisherman, a poet with imagination all compact. Seldom did he tell the

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truth, but never did he tell a lie. He was a romanticist. It is only the romanticist who really lives, or who will live. As long as there are anglers to go out confidently for the unseen, to tell their "whoppers" that quicken the imagination of the unimaginative, and awake the creative soul, and to work in fabrics that are immaterial and therefore imperishable, there is hope for America.

VI

Simon Peter, the foundations of his hope broken, the dream that had glorified him shattered suddenly in utter tragedy, showed the greatness of his soul when he cried, "Boys, I'm going fishing." It was the measure of the man; Judas committed suicide.

May the race of anglers increase in the earth; the age needs them. It needs sorely old Izaak's book, which was written for "all that are lovers of virtue, and dare trust in His providence, and be quiet, and go a-Angling." In the tragic days that have followed the time when all the world

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went insane, let us quit for a time the noise and the shrill contentions and seek the clean fresh streams where the trout are or the bass or the salmon. Let us with the neighbor whom we know and whom we love leave the rush and the roar, let us sit in a boat or on a bank and fish and fish and rest our sorely harassed souls. A day, a week, a month if we need it that badly, and then "the next day let every man leave fishing and fall to his business," but fall to it only with the reservation Viator made to glorious old Charles Cotton: "if I live till May come twelvemonth you are sure of me again."

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A Letter from the Sabine Farm to Hamlin Garland.

I

DEAR old Contemporary:
Your arraignment of the evil times upon which our literature and all our morals have so fallen of late I have read carefully and with startled conviction. On being sixty is a serious theme, Brother Hamlin. We who were born in the fighting sixties are getting rude shocks these rough latter days. Not without penalties comes the grand climacteric to every man, but sometimes it seems as if our generation was paying penalties undeservedly severe. But what good to rage about it? Let the heathen rage—the thirty authors of “Civilization in America.” It is better far to be serene these glorious days of our Indian Summer, while the arteries are hardening and the

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feet of the young men are not yet at the door. Counterblasts against youth—what are they but vexation of spirit and a striving after the wind? The period we are entering belongs to them and not to us, and they know it, the rascals.

Had old Chapman ever lived in these robustious days he would have headed his line quite the other way: "Old men think young men fools, but young men know old men are." That's nearer the times, but when was it ever different? Youth calls to youth and hears no other calling. In more primitive days they strangled the old men to be rid of their croaking. And still they do it. In the comedy of youth we furnish the humor:

I know it is a sin
For me to sit and grin
At him here—

But all the same he grins. Polonius is the clown in "Hamlet"; King James's sulphurous counterblast against tobacco is the chief bit now of Jacobean humor. It blew away nothing at all but the old man's wind. Fraternities in college love dearly such bon-mots printed as broadsides for

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their smoking-rooms. Why counterblast at all with December howling down upon us? To say the world now looks like sixty is only to confess one's age.

II

But I said the Indian Summer weather is glorious. It is; it is glorious. There are compensations even for being sixty. One has gained then a perspective that youth never dreams of; one has lived then in two distinct periods of thirty years—two generations. There have been, now one discovers, other “younger generations” just as original and just as wicked as ours ever was and just as confident of their ability to shock the whole world and remake it overnight. But youth—what does youth care about history? By the youngsters in our colleges, notably those in the graduate school and the “scrub faculty” stages of incubation, this “younger generation” flurry of the last two or three years has been actually taken with real seriousness, even to the displacement at times of the Ten Commandments and the four Gospels. To

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these pin-feathered squabblings it is as if the race suddenly had evolved a new genus homo. The million-year dinosaur egg has been hatched out now by radium, and the race stands gog-eyed in terror before the young monster. When he grows up he will destroy the human race. And sixty lies back and laughs, as the immortal gods laugh when they watch us swell up and boast of our importance. Is there no joy in that? as old Charles Lamb used to say. As if there had not been a "younger generation" every thirty years—three to the century—ever since old Adam worried himself sick over the degeneracy of his first-born Cain.

There is nothing abnormal and nothing wicked about this new crop of youngsters, Hamlin—some of them not so young any more—these striplings that are so fast taking our places. There are just about so many drops of genius and so many of talent and about so many barrels of pure cussedness put into every batch of new humanity, and the formula has n't been changed very much since that first mixing in the old Garden plot. The youngsters have got better tools now to work with

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and smoother and richer fields to till than any generation before them ever had—they can thank us and our elders for that—and they have acquired a kind of superficial smartness in the handling of these keen-cutters whose tempering they had nothing to do with, and they themselves account it brilliance, but all in all they are not surpassing very much the ancient averages. They are neither better nor worse in art or in ethics, and time will sift out for preservation in the uncrowded museum of fame about the usual small number of specimens. Let's drop that term "younger generation," Hamlin. It is getting to be laughable; and "young radicals"—as if every youngster was n't from the moment he arrived a radical of the radicals.

Let others sing of land and sea:
A rebel poet I would be.
I'd fling my shafts of living fire,
Arousing dormant man to ire.

That is youth for you—every youth. There is no standing against youth or arguing with youth.

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III

I had thought to begin with Aristotle and the Greeks and to quote from the Polonius of every century the age-old wail that the new crop of youth is a total failure and that the seed-corn for the future is moldy beyond all germination. But the thing would grow into a book and would be a monotonous thing beyond all endurance. It would be a study on the side of human littleness, and who wants that? He who sees the world degenerate and hopeless, let him look to his own self. Pessimistic criticism is the oldest of all the arts and the only art of the oldest. One finds it most thickly scattered, curiously enough, just at the opening of new and vital periods in human history. Not long ago I picked up the first volume of Dennie's "Philadelphia Port Folio," 1801, the best literary magazine in the young America for two decades, and I found this senile note:

When classical learning is exploited as a senseless study of words; public quiet disturbed by every boorish brawler; a church pronounced no better than a barn and the Bible classed with an obsolete almanac; when

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genius, talents and virtue are wrenched from their just elevation, and "trodden under the hooves of a swinish multitude," it is right and decorous and useful to be partial, bigoted, adhesive to old systems.

The crier changes from generation to generation, but the old cry is the same forever.

IV

Remember those glorious fin de siècle days of the nineteenth century, Hamlin, when our generation had its first chance to do what never it could have done had not Emerson and his great compeers died so opportunely off and yielded their field and their tools to our generation? What a fighter you were in those braw days when the thirties sat lightly on your soul and the world was but a golf-ball for your mighty mashie. And now you say you are "out of key with many of the present-day writers of criticism." Remember "Crumbling Idols"? That indeed was something to reckon with, even if the "Boston Literary World" did sneer nastily, "It's another case of measles; the youth will recover." That was some-

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thing to be out of key with, but what cared you for their criticisms? The pessimism of the old only sharpens the razors of youth; it but confirms the youngster in his radicalism. "Youth should be free from the domination of the dead," you shouted. This book is "intended to weaken the hold of conventionalism upon the youthful artist."

There come times in the development of every art when the creative mind reasserts itself and shakes itself loose from the terrible power of the past. This dissent, this demand for artistic freedom, is always made by youth, and always meets with the bitter and scornful opposition of the old.

It is natural for youth to overleap barriers. He naturally discards the wig and cloak of his grandfathers. He comes at last to reject, perhaps a little too brusquely, the models which conservatism regards with awe. He respects them as history, but he has life, abounding, fresh, contiguous life; life that sings and smothers and overwhelms and exalts, like the salt, green, snow-tipped ocean surf; life with its terrors and triumphs, right here and now; its infinite drama, its allurements, its battles and its victories. Life is the model, truth is the master, the heart of man himself his motive-power.

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Well said, old war-horse. No one has ever expressed the gospel of youth any more eloquently. You were thirty-four then and out to break idols, just as this new set of "young radicals" is now out to crumble the idols you set up after crumbling the best you knew the older idols you found by the market-place wall. How many hundreds—or thousands—of letters was it that you received from the outraged older generation, and how many annihilating reviews? I remember hearing of it at the time and glorying in it. Oh, it was a wicked book in the day of it—a very radical book indeed! But you were only one of a glorious company, Hamlin. What an exhilarating "younger generation" that was that broke so breezily into the nineties. There was Stephen Crane, whose first volume, "Maggie, a Girl of the Streets," was so vivid in its sex portrayal that no publisher in America would touch it, though they recognized its power. And how Howells and you fought for the book and for the author—and triumphed! Crane is a classic now.

And there was glorious old Frank Norris. I can hear his shouts even yet: "*In the last analysis*

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the People are always right." The italics and the capital are his:

A literature that cannot be vulgarized is no literature at all and will perish.

Is it not, in Heaven's name, essential that the People hear not a lie but the Truth?

By God, I told them the truth.

Frankly and unreservedly the native American drama is just about as bad as it can be.

Censorship?—not in the least for young Frank Norris:

In the name of American literature let the plain people read, anything—anything, whether it is three days or three years old. Mr. Carnegie will not educate the public taste by shutting his libraries upon recent fiction. The public taste will educate itself by *much* reading. Not by restricted *reading*.

V

That was the voice of your generation, Hamlin. But this is the law: no generation ever stands alone; it stands on the shoulders of its fathers and its grandfathers. In other words, these

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"young radicals" of to-day are precisely what your generation has made them. These sex-obsessed youngsters who so fill you with "weariness and disgust"—what were they reading in the days that for them were formative? They were reading many things, but surely in the list were the "Maggie," which you and Howells so heroically rescued from the scrap-heap, and "Rose of Dutcher's Coolly," which bore your name as author. You bring indictment that our fiction to-day is becoming "Europeanized," that the "young radicals" now are "imitating the French, the Norwegian, and the Russian." Undoubtedly they are, and to the strengthening, perhaps, of their art. But how many pages of your "Crumbling Idols" in 1896 were devoted to the glorification of the methods and the message of the Norwegian Ibsen? And who chiefly is responsible for introducing the Russians to America? William Dean Howells, unquestionably.

It is conventional now to rate Howells as a literary mollicoddle, timid and reactionary, but you and I know how lustily he fought always for the wild native tangs and for that lusty new "he-man"

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realism which so shocked and alarmed the older mid-century group. It was he who opened the columns of the "Atlantic" for Mark Twain when to the rest of Boston he was but a wild and vulgar Western showman of the Roaring Camp variety. It was he who gave hearty welcome to Bret Harte when his "Luck of Roaring Camp" was built about a sex motif in that day, so shocking that feminine proof-readers refused to handle even the proof-sheets of it.

VI

And how gloriously he helped you, Hamlin, at the moment when you needed help most! And how he boosted Crane and Norris and all the rest of the "young radicals" we thought so wicked in those squeamish days of the early nineties! And how he preached to us month by month the glories of Tolstoy and the Russians as if at last had been discovered the millennium long-lost golden emrods of art! This vigorous foreign policy of the eighties and the nineties bore fruit, Hamlin. To relish Russian caviar and French absinthe one

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must cultivate the taste for long periods, and we youngsters cultivated it. You and Crane and Norris and the others were to him then "the younger generation," and like every other "younger generation" you took long leaps in advance of your master. You began preaching not realism but "veritism," and Norris, who was younger still, preached "naturalism," which was a step still further yet. And we youngsters in college and out of it read with eagerness "Anna Karénina" and "The Kreutzer Sonata," while Theodore Roosevelt was growling angrily:

The man who wrote that was a sexual and a moral pervert. . . . "The Kreutzer Sonata" has as its theme that this relation [between husband and wife] is bestial and repellent, and its whole purpose is to paint the love of husband and wife as loving exactly the same as the squalid and loathsome intimacy between a rake and a prostitute. . . . No greater wrong can be done humanity. . . .

and so on and on to the end of his strenuous indictment. Then later, following Crane and Norris, how we reveled in shuddery delight in "Zola" and in Daudet's "Sapho" and the rest.

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Who uncorked the jug and first let loose this infernal jinnée that has so befouled America and filled your soul with "weariness and disgust"? No one man did it undoubtedly, and no one group of men. It came perhaps as an inevitable stage of the adolescence of civilization, like the chicken-pox in the evolution of youth, but it was carefully prepared for and it was precipitated, for better or for worse, by the realism and "veritism" and "naturalism" which you and your generation preached so eloquently in the eighties and the nineties. The war-cry then was, "Truth, Truth!" What is truth? Just at what point does "veritism" have to cease? If the Truth is to be told, shall it be the whole Truth or censored Truth? Who shall be the censor? The churches? The old people? The general public? Did not you in "Rose of Dutcher's Coolly," 1896, go to the extreme limit the public of that day would tolerate and beyond? Is my memory correct that there was a threat, if not a movement, to exclude it from the mails? It makes us smile now that anybody was shocked by it, but that is not the point at present. It did shock its age and to such an extent that

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public libraries excluded it—asininely, of course; but they felt about it much as you feel to-day about the morals of the current novels. The New York "Critic," you will recall, declared the book a cross between Zola and Howells, and also it said this:

We are bound to say, after reading both books, that "Rose of Dutcher's Coolly" leaves a more disagreeable taste in the mouth than "Jude the Obscure." Mr. Garland's word "sex-maniac" is barbarous enough; but the continual dwelling on (we had almost said gloating over) the thing is far worse. . . . Zola's radical mistake is made throughout—that of taking perversions such as fall within the province of specialists, of a Nordau or a Lombroso, and painting them as inseparable attributes of human nature in general.

Substitute Havelock Ellis and Ellen Key and Freud for Nordau and Lombroso, and the review would do very well for most of the new sex novels on the tables of our book-reviewers to-day. The frontiers of realism and "veritism" and even "naturalism" have been pushed far beyond any horizons you ever dreamed of in your "Crumbling Idols" days, but you were with the pioneers who blazed

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the early trails. Your disciples have pushed on as far beyond you as you and Crane pushed on beyond Howells and James. We are but reaping the inevitable results of realism, that realism that has so smitten with literary sterility the past thirty years. I was reading only yesterday the latest from Agnes Repplier, who so often says in her sparkling way the very thing you had intended yourself:

Realists are plentiful, and their ranks are freshly recruited every year. Artists are rare, and grow always rarer in an age which lacks the freedom, the serenity, the sense of proportion, essential to their development.

And I recall how Lafcadio Hearn, artist and prophet and glorious romanticist, growing larger in our literature with every decade, despised the realistic movement of his day. This was his voice in the Early Eighties when Howells' article in the "Century" was turning the whole current of our fiction:

In truth this debauching realism tends to make fiction miss its highest purpose—the recreation of minds that are weary of the toil and strife of the world. The

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average man sees enough of human depravity; he knows too many absolutely commonplace people; he is too often at the mercy of bores; therefore, when he turns to fiction for rest, he wants and expects something different from the routine of his daily life. . . . So long as human nature remains unchanged there will be an unappeasable yearning for the idealism without which men have neither the courage to struggle nor the power to enjoy.

Realism in art has reached its maximum swing, Brother Hamlin. The pendulum during all the centuries has been never still. Romanticism always follows Classicism as spring follows winter, and the great ages of the human spirit and the great periods in the history of literature have been always the romantic ages.

A new romantic period is opening in America: these extremes of realism are but the desperate last gasps of a dying genre. A new young school of romanticists already is pluming its wings. America has all the materials for a new Elizabethan age of poetry and of prose. The Epic of the New World and the great American novel are all unwritten: why worry about the struggles of the dying old period? A new period is being born;

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a new volume is being opened in the history of the unquenchable spirit of man.

VII

But this present obsession of literature with sex, it is bad, of course. But its chief badness lies in its over-emphasis of a single phase of human life. That is bad art. Sex, like manners, may be called two thirds of life, or it may be one half of life, or one third—it depends upon the writer and the age of the writer. Sex novels of the extreme type are written by men and women who are hovering around forty or are considerably beyond it. Check the list, beginning with Anderson, Atherton, and so on down; it will set you to thinking. The percentage of sex in the modern novelist's formula for a human life—taking life in its fullest and largest sense—is certainly too high. And that again is bad art, and bad art will not be eternally endured. This very over-emphasis carries with it safety. Abuses die not because of warfare upon them from without: they die always of their own excesses. Death comes always from something

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too much. Could we live in perfect balance, life would be immortal.

But why this sudden over-emphasis? Why all at once this universal toleration of 'naked spade-calling that only a decade ago would have been rated as extreme obscenity? Why is it now possible in almost any assembly to discuss without giving offense "delicate" topics stripped bare of all covering—topics that only yesterday were mentioned only in whispers save in brothels and medical schools? What has suddenly happened? I ask as a philosopher.

VIII

First, America has been fed upon realism for a generation in gradually increased strength of dose—realism, veritism, naturalism, yellow-journalized naturalism, stark-nakedism. Then there has been a tremendous advance in scientific knowledge, biological and psychological, during the last two or three decades. These youngsters of to-day know vastly more of realistic biological fact than ever we did at their age. Modern science has stripped the

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veils from life one by one, and these youngsters with perfectly natural curiosity have peered eagerly and often morbidly behind every one. Adolescence has become a science by itself, lectured upon even in high schools. Havelock Ellis, Ellen Key, and all the voluminous sex-knowledge books, some of them mere panderers to morbid curiosity, were things the eighties knew little of. The men and women of the eighties undoubtedly would have been inexpressibly shocked—I mean the average men and women of the eighties—had some of these books been discovered on the parlor center-table. Now everything connected with legitimate and illegitimate sexual biology is talked about in plainest terms everywhere and by everybody as science. I do not condemn; I simply explain. Then, thirdly, there was the World War, upon whose shoulders it is safe to place everything at present abnormal and immoral.

IX

But war and sex matters always have gone closely together—Venus and Mars. Jumping all

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earlier wars, consider how the very beginnings of American fiction were entwined with the war-sex motif. The first American novel, 1789, proclaimed that its purpose was "to expose the dangerous consequences of seduction," and Boston suppressed it in speedy wrath. Then came the greatest sex novel in our history—if popularity be an index of greatness—"Charlotte Temple," which up to date has sold more than one hundred editions. For a generation the seduction theme so ruled the fiction of the feminine magazines and lady's books that it is safe to speak of the first thirty years of American fiction as the "seduction period."

The cause? Richardson and Goldsmith to a degree, but the primary cause was the Revolutionary War. A peculiarly unsophisticated population, largely rural, came into contact all at once with armies—British soldiers resplendent in scarlet uniforms bringing with them the romance of the Old World, French soldiers equally resplendent, American soldiers, patriots, all of them young and teeming with life and all of them irrepressible and irresponsible. And war breaks down always

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the barriers of convention, removes all inhibitions, and feeds in young men bound together for long periods in masculine immurement all the herd passions. And the effect upon the feminine of brass buttons needs no telling again. The lesson in 1789 was new to America, and it made a tremendous impression. There is a submerged history of every war, one never written save in such books as "Charlotte Temple," which are classed as fiction. The seduction school after the Revolution told all it could tell, all it dared to tell. And the World War was like it, only on an incomparably vaster scale. It struck paralyzing blows at refinement, at reticence, at conventions, at morals. In war-time one speaks aloud of all the brute there is in man. Civilization stops, and the naked jungle lives again. Now our "Charlotte Temples" can be made as detailedly realistic as we may care to make them. Now it can be told—everything.

One cannot indict a whole people, Hamlin. Washington Irving, in a review never republished, once wrote:

No author who writes for popularity would be ever guilty of the preposterous folly of polluting the public

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ear with licentious ribaldry unless tolerably well satisfied that it was attuned to such harmony.

A large percentage of the people want this kind of reading-matter or there would be no profit in publishing so many hundreds of titles every year; and the percentage that does not read this highly spiced variety of fiction reads Harold Bell Wright and Zane Grey, just as in our day they read E. P. Roe. If only New York wanted this abominable art it would quickly die out; but the whole people want it. Democracy is a vulgar thing, but there is amazing vitality in it. You can't drive it; you can't hasten it; you must go down to it. You may deplore and even revile with superlatives the low literary standards of this mass, but reviling will change nothing. Don't condemn Mrs. Atherton or Anderson or Harold Bell Wright; blow you as bitter blasts as you may, Athertonism and Andersonism and Wrightism will not be blown out of the American people. Thank God they are reading anything at all—*anything*, to use Norris's words. The mass is rising in America; rising with almost glacier-like slowness, but nevertheless rising. It is discouraging at times. The mov-

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ies, even as you say, are unspeakably bad, but the badness is fundamentally the badness of bad art. Charlie Chaplin is now writing our American drama—Charlie Chaplin! [There are times when the saying of damn is positively necessary, but it is equally necessary to say it like a philosopher.] Charlie Chaplin is educating our “youngest generation”—but even at this point there is hope. The very badness of the movies may be their salvation.

The best pronouncement on criticism ever made was Angelo's “I criticize by creating.” Let's cease growling and create art that is at the height of our powers whether we starve for it or not. Let us preach the glory of the perfect rather than carp eternally, as the small-town school and the depressed realists are doing, at the cheapness and the grossness of the democratic mass. I confidently believe that we are on the threshold of the greatest literary era America has ever known. A new and glorious romantic period is upon us that will glorify our civilization and not revile it. The new vital West is awaking. Leave New York that so depresses you, Hamlin, and go and live with the men you understand and are wholly at home with.

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In New York's stale and reeking atmosphere genius evaporates and leaves behind it but journalism and then pessimism and then snarling contempt for all the standards upon which the race has lifted itself from the jungle. Go back home into the new free West where your genius first found its expression. Already the vital and creative forces of American literature are west of the Alleghenies. The Plains are calling you. Hasten like old Lot out of the Sodom and Gomorrah that shrivel and kill. Your best days even yet may be the years that are to come.

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I

THE most hackneyed, perhaps of all American apothegms pertaining to education is that defining a college as a log with Mark Hopkins on one end and a student on the other. It has survived its generation and has entered into our common speech partly because of its picturesque concreteness and partly because of its obvious truth. "Obvious," I repeat, though I am aware that each of its three elements is open to challenge. Plato, confronted with the dictum, might have asked, What need of any log? The modern state university trustee, fresh from his inspection of the athletic field and the extension-school offices and the fraternity-houses, might ask, What need of any Mark Hopkins? And the old-fashioned teaching scholar, viewing the horde that has invaded his

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class-room, might ask in helpless sarcasm, What need of any student?

To Garfield, however, when he made the definition, and to all of the men of his generation educated under the old academic system, it admitted no debate. As he made it, he had in his imagination's eye a struggling small college of the earlier type, his own Hiram doubtless, himself the president, or Williams his *alma mater*, Mark Hopkins the president—teaching presidents both of them, meeting day by day large sections of their students in those vital class-room contacts that come only to the actual teacher. The definition in its concrete imagery smacks of primitive conditions. The "log" stands for the frontier, for improvised conveniences, for ability to do much with very little; the "Mark Hopkins" stands for the primitive type of teacher, happily not quite extinct, the man with individuality and scholarship and character and contagious power, the teacher who chose his profession deliberately because he considered it superior to any other profession open to the college-trained man, the teacher who would have been a leader of his generation in whatever profession he

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might have chosen; and the "student" in the definition meant *student*—not merely a matriculant of a college; it carried with it the connotation of congenital aptitude for scholarship and enthusiasm for learning for learning's sake.

The definition grows upon one. It sets the extreme limit as to class size. The perfect class has two members; master and learner, Christ and Nicodemus. "We know thou art a teacher come from God," declares the pupil, and at once he is in the perfect attitude for learning. *Where* the lesson Nicodemus learned was taught, whether in a room with apparatus or under the night sky in parapatetic disconnection with all things material, we do not ask. The whole of education, as the greatest of all the teachers conceived of it, consisted simply in bringing the proper learner in proper mood into the presence of the master.

This was also the conception of Socrates, whose university consisted of himself and whatever receptive individual he might chance upon in the Athenian streets. It was the conception of Plato,

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the whole plant of whose academy consisted of the grove in which he walked with his disciples. And the grove was not an absolute necessity; it was but an incidental convenience. The vital thing in Plato's Academy was Plato, and only Plato. With Confucious also, with Jesus, with every great teacher the world has ever known, it has been the same. With all of them the fundamental postulate of education has been this: the central fact, the sole index of the efficiency of the teaching process, the only guarantee of its results, is the Teacher. All else is incidental and subordinate. And with all these master teachers the second postulate has been this: the ideal class is small, always carefully chosen, always both in sympathy and in powers able to follow the master to the limits of his leading. The Supreme Teacher of all picked with care, and one by one, a class limited to twelve members. He gave them three years of intensest training, and the day of their graduation not one of them ever forgot. The course in his university changed their lives; it changed the history of the world.

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ii

It is not too strong a statement to declare that we have to-day completely outgrown Garfield's definition, so completely indeed that it seems like a bit of American humor or at best a specimen of early American idealism. The "student" has been amazingly multiplied, and it is time now for a new name for him, for of all things he is not a student. "Mark Hopkins" has become a president without a class-room; he never meets the "student" at all save at opening or closing convocations or at athletic mass-meetings. He has become a mere administrator, the business manager of a great plant, a lobbyist often at the general assembly of the State, a peripatetic raiser of funds, an applauded lecturer before women's clubs and rotary clubs and boards of trade, a dignitary in gorgeous robes at intercollegiate functions, resplendent at commencement, an absentee for long periods from the college campus. Or, failing this, "Mark Hopkins" has become a dean, a functionary who also does no teaching, or he has been "elevated" into some other executive office that carries

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with it no class-room duties. And in the old chair which each of these men once efficiently occupied sits to-day a subordinate instructor whose chief qualification for his position is willingness to work his whole life long for small wages. And the "log"—the log has been sawed and quartered and miraculously multiplied and piled toward heaven and bedecked and embellished until it has become the dominating element in the definition.

A great American college to-day is a show-place well worthy of being included in an all-American grand tour. Often it covers much land in the heart of a great city where acre prices are in bewilderingly large figures. And on this land has been upreared a small city of stately halls, architecturally magnificent, luxurious in equipment, each the monument of a munificent donor, the most perfect of all monuments since the university which is to be forever has guaranteed it perpetual care. A single building at Harvard has cost more than Harvard's whole plant was worth during the centuries when she was producing that roll of graduates which has so left its mark upon America. A college to-day may be defined as costly

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land upon which are many costly buildings embowered in distinctive landscape gardening surrounded by luxurious palaces called fraternity-houses, and all of it handy to a mammoth million-dollar colosseum the seat of frequent gladiatorial games—the whole forming a completely equipped city- or country-club for thousands or tens of thousands of young men and women.

III

The temptation is strong to indulge here in statistics. They are easily obtained, and they are startling. Total plant values, fraternity-house totals and averages, budget percentages as between plant maintenance, administration expense, and salaries paid to athletic coaches and teachers—all of these are public property if one seriously sets out to obtain them. The state universities have them elaborately tabulated and printed and laid on all desks of legislators and state officials during the session of the legislature. The index of the success of a college is the size and condition of its plant. Could some representative from a newly

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discovered civilization come to our shores and ask to be shown over one of our great educational institutions, nine tenths of all he would be shown would be what Garfield termed the "log." All that Clemenceau saw of Yale was the "bowl" at one of the periods when it was brimming full. The best time to see Harvard is in the vacation period.

But it is not my purpose to dwell on this phase of college life. My indictment goes far deeper than these surface conditions. Allow me to misquote Goldsmith:

Ill fares the college, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

It is the decay of men in our colleges that fills me with alarm. This is my indictment: the enormous emphasis put of late years upon the "log" in American college and university education has unseated "Mark Hopkins" and rendered all but extinct the type which Garfield designated the "student."

Let us begin where all campus discussion begins, with the college president. Almost invariably he

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has been chosen because of distinctive success in some professional field, most often educational. He has spent years preparing himself as a specialist in some highly technical branch of human knowledge; he has attracted attention to himself by the brilliancy of his specialized work, and as a result he has been called to the presidency of a college. He has reached the head of his profession; he has attained now the supreme reward of the educator; and with the consciousness of having taken a long step in advance he abandons the specialty to which he has given his preparatory years and to which he is just ready to render the highest service, and at the same time he ceases forever to be a teacher. And the new profession which he now enters is one for which he has had little preparation.

One thinks at this point of Dr. Nichols of Dartmouth, who at the moment when he had made himself an international figure by his discoveries in the physical laboratory of the college and was just at the point where he might have advanced the frontiers of his subject and impressed himself upon the class-room with compelling power was

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called from his laboratory to the presidency of the college, and from that moment was no longer a discoverer, no longer a teacher, but merely an administrator. A great scientist lost; a great teacher lost. Count the colleges and universities of the United States, and in a general way you will have the total number of those who have deliberately dropped the specialty for which the best part of their lives has been a preparation, deliberately ceased to be "Mark Hopkinses," teachers, molders of the new generation, and have become merely custodians of the "log," raisers of funds, makers of budgets, directors of business, wearers of academic costume, workers merely with material things.

IV

Almost identical is the case of the deans: the dean of men and the dean of women, the deans of schools undergraduate and professional, all of them drafted from the teaching staff because of work distinctively done in the field of their specialty. Practically all of them have abandoned

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their classes, practically all have ceased to be educators, the administrative duties of their deanship absorbing the totality of their time and powers. A large university may have as many as a dozen of these deans, presumably the strongest men that could be found in the faculties, and all of them have ceased to teach in order that they may, at an increased salary, do work that a clever graduate of a good business college might do with equal effectiveness.

But the indictment goes deeper still: the list of teachers so effective that they are not suffered to teach does not end with the president and the deans. College vice-presidents, controllers, secretaries to the president, registrars, examiners, librarians, curators, and others are all drawn from the most efficient end of the teaching force at an increase of salary, until the non-teaching corps is a whole faculty in itself, and, what is more, it is the only really well-paid part of the college staff, always excepting the athletic directors. An experienced department head once complained to me that in thirty years every really distinctive teacher

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he had ever evolved had sooner or later been drawn off into an administrative position.

And one may add still another class to the administrative force semi-non-teaching in its functions: department heads, thirty or forty of them in some insitutions, for the most part relieved of all save a minimum of class-room work because of the administrative work believed to be inseparable from their position. And these department heads, like the president and the deans and the executive heads, are the best teachers the college possesses, the ones best fitted day by day in actual class-room contact to impress and inspire and direct the plastic student in the most effective way. The efficiency, the personality, the power that brought them their administrative position should be exerted to the full upon the student body in the class-room and the laboratory. Any other use of their powers is distinctively inferior, no matter how profoundly these men may impress the mature world.

Why is "Mark Hopkins," the teacher whose supreme ambition is to be a teacher and only a

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teacher, disappearing from our colleges and universities? Why do specialists with individuality and creative power, scholars in the ancient sense of this abused term, drop all in a moment their work and enter a new field for which they have had little preparation? Salary, for one thing. The plums on the educational tree are with few exceptions reserved for the administrator. The mere teacher who does not care to dissipate his power as a dean or a department head will work all his life long for the wages paid a porter or a boot-black. The president with his secretaries, the vice-president, the deans with their office force, the heads of departments with their stenographers, and all the other executive heads with their clerks and helpers—these are the ones who cut most deeply into the salary-roll of the college. To do the actual teaching on what is left after these huge bites have been made means the employment of a large force of very young instructors, apprentices, callow neophytes just graduated and almost totally without experience, added to the force at a wage ridiculously low because of the privilege given them of securing in the odds and ends of

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their time the master's or the doctor's degree. No wonder the "student" exclaims: "Don't let your studies interfere with your education." The classroom has become a joke. The freshman meets no other teachers, and even the senior often finds them in charge of his "major" courses. It means, too, impossibly large sections of the upper-classmen in history, economics, literature, and the like—fifty, a hundred, sometimes two or three hundred. The instructor becomes a mere speech-maker, a droner over a manuscript, an endless talker rather than a teacher, doing all the work for his class save the slovenly taking down of "notes" on the part of the listless victims condemned day after day to sit and be pumped into like passive buckets.

v

But salary is not all that tempts the superior teacher to leave his class-room. The honors of the academic world to-day, all of them, go to the administrator. The honorary degrees at commencement are seldom for the mere teacher, how-

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ever effective he may have been in shaping and directing the young lives put into his charge. But let him be elected to the presidency even of a fashionable fitting school, or to a deanship in a college, and at once some institution rewards him with its degree. All this in the face of the fact that university administration could be done efficiently by one not fitted at all to be a teacher; by a man, moreover, without a college degree; by any man, indeed, who could take charge of any other equally large institution, be it manufacturing or military or financial. Most of the routine in the offices of the deans could be attended to by efficient clerks; most of the lobbying at state capitals and most of the soliciting of funds from various sources could be done as well by non-college workers as by college presidents. Registrars, president's secretaries, financial officers, and the like differ very little from the employees in business houses, and they could better be furnished by business colleges than drawn from the ranks of the specialized teachers. Even college presidents could be secured from the mercantile or the military professions with greatly more promise of suc-

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cess than from the teaching ranks. But so long as these executive positions are looked upon as the supreme prizes to be won by the teacher the draft still will come from the college forces. The pomp and the regalia of the academic procession; the prominence given on the days of brilliant occasion; the applause of the rotary club, the chamber of commerce, the woman's lecture course; the "Rah! Rah! for Prexie, fellows!" of the student mass-meeting; the autocratic power to summon men or to send them empty away; the directing of vast funds and the boss-ship over many material things; and the power latent in it all, a power almost czar-like within its limited area—all these will still spur the strong teacher to set administration as the final goal of his ambition rather than the directing of living souls, which is the heaven-given privilege of the great teacher. In education truly the "log" has become king.

With men in our class-rooms, men picked as presidents of railroads are picked, or as leaders in the industrial world, or indeed even as football coaches are picked, the advanced men of their generation, the men best fitted to do the work regard-

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less of what salary they may demand, then it will be that the class-room will make the chief imprint upon the finished product turned out by the university. That this should be the supreme aim of the college there can be no question. The idea is by no means a new one. Old Roger Ascham in the early years of Queen Elizabeth voiced it with emphasis:

It is a pity that commonly more care is had, yea and that amongst very wise men, to find out rather a cunning man for their horse than a cunning man for their children. They say nay in word, but they do so in deed. For to the one they will gladly give a stipend of 200 crowns and loath to offer to the other 200 shillings. God that sitteth in heaven laugheth their choice to scorn and rewardeth their liberality as it should, for he suffereth them to have a tame and well ordered horse, but wild and unfortunate children, and therefore in the end they find more pleasure in their horse than comfort in their children.

VI

The most appalling effect of the Mark Hopkins dethronement is to be found in the manifest deterioration of the undergraduate body. One does

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not have to depend upon the reports of the departments of English and mathematics and chemistry, or the statistics of registrars, for information concerning this degeneration. Army leaders during the war complained that the college graduates upon whom they had chiefly depended for their supply of under-officers were men untrained, smatterers, youths incapable of long concentration and impatient of restraint. Many of our young engineers came home from Europe amazed at the breadth and the thoroughness and the accuracy of the equally young French engineers with whom they had been thrown. The American graduate from a state university knew in a general way his civil engineering, but he was not a thorough master, and he knew little else save this one area. He had not been educated, at least in the class-room, and the European engineer to his amazement was a broad scholar as well as a thorough specialist. Tens of thousands, to cite a single example, study French from one to six semesters in our American colleges, yet not one of them leaves college actually speaking French, and very few of them are able even to read the language with any comprehensive-

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ness or ease. Thoroughness, accuracy, scholarship, concentration to the point of mastery are to be found in so few college undergraduates that they may be said to be all but wanting in our modern education.

It is needless to go into detail. Every college atmosphere is heavily charged with criticism of the student body. Every instructor has his pet theory concerning the causes of the present college "slump." College presidents like Woodrow Wilson complain that the side-shows have swallowed up the circus; others dwell much on the decadence of the old ideals and the "belligerent younger generation"; still others lay the blame upon the fitting schools and the grades below; and there are those who dismiss the whole matter as one of the unavoidable accompaniments of democracy. To educate all of the people, these philosophers contend, to bring all of Main Street into the high school and even into the college class-room, is a leveling-down process that is bound to lower the old aristocratic standards. All of these arguments are mere evasion. The cause of the "slump" in our colleges is fundamentally this: "Mark Hop-

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kins" has been pushed from the "log"; the "log" has been made king; the teacher is disappearing from the American class-room.

And the student contempt for the teacher is everywhere fed to fatness. The distinguished president of the board of trustees of one of our large Eastern colleges, for instance, appealing recently to the alumni for funds for a drive for "student welfare buildings," declared that the undergraduate student life is the real vital educative force of the college: "The distinctive imprint which a student or an alumnus of a college bears is put on him by the student life of the college, the life outside the class-room." The president of one of the land-grant colleges frequently told his assembled faculty that they were the "hired men of the institution," hired at specified wages to work for the students. This he repeated to his student body, adding for their benefit a rule for the detecting of poor teachers: "He who 'flunks' many of his class thereby demonstrates his inability to teach." No wonder that standards fall and teachers cease to do their best with enthusiasm.

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VII

When the emphasis again is placed upon the teacher, when he again is held in respect and is adequately paid, when the extra-class-room activities are relegated to second place, and the "log" is dethroned, efficiency and scholarship will come again to our colleges. To prove that this can be done, one need cite but a single example. The football coach to-day is an actual teacher with a small class, and he is paid an adequate salary, one that will draw the desired man from any other profession that may be holding him. He is chosen with extreme care and always because he is considered the best available man in the whole country for the particular task in hand. As a result he does efficient work; he brings to his small class thoroughness and discipline and self-control and accuracy, and when he has completed his three years' course with an individual player he has developed that man to the utmost of the man's powers. Whether it has been worth while to develop the man for merely gladiatorial ends has no place in my argument. The essential point

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is this: the man has been educated by a master until he has himself become a master.

Better Mark Hopkins in a miserable barn without a shred of equipment than a half-baked instructor in a marble laboratory equipped with the last word in apparatus. Honor where honor belongs. Let the president delegate a part of his work to skilful clerks, and let him teach the senior class as of old. Let the dean, the high-salaried fifth wheel of the university chariot, appoint a committee of his school to determine academic policies and delegate the rest of his duties to a stenographer, and give himself to the teaching of his students as they should be taught. Limit the student body to a number that can be adequately handled in small sections. Give the degrees and the salaries and the public honors to the actual teacher who is worthy. Bring back Mark Hopkins, whatever he may cost, for not until he appears again shall we have students in our colleges and universities.

THE TRUE STATUS OF THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY

I

CONCERNING no other literary subject, save perhaps modern verse, has more foolishness been written during the past three decades than concerning the American short story. The technique of it has been raised to an exact science with codified laws, furnishing semester courses in colleges and even in high schools. The literature of it—the manuals and handbooks and year-books and the collections for school use—has made necessary a new alcove in public libraries. Correspondence schools that teach it as a trade as they do bricklaying and electrical engineering have arisen and flourished. After thirty lessons, it may be after twenty, the pupil is ready for a literary career. “To-day our students are writing for practically every magazine of consequence in the

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United States, Canada, and England," declares the dean of the correspondence courses. His alumni, he believes, are beginning to be dominating forces in the literary world. At least one college professor of literature, he affirms, has proved the value of his short-story course by cold figures: a given number in his last class had a given number of stories accepted by the magazines within six months with a total cash return of a given number of dollars. From these known data it was easy to compute probabilities: the average number of probable rejections before success; the approximate cash value of a first story; the magazines most likely to accept stories of beginners; and the returns that reasonably might be expected per month or per year by diligent takers of his course.

Short-story writing is therefore now a trade-school matter, a hand-work vocation to be acquired by mere diligence and mastery of technique. Moreover, it is taught, even in the universities, as a newness, as a newly discovered literary form the laws of which have only recently been worked out. The student who elects it is made to feel that he has been given the privilege of breaking loose from

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the old conventional "pennyroyal" literary course that led nowhere, and of entering under modern guidance newly charted areas, practical, scientific, businesslike. For the first time now he has a literary subject that has an object; there is concreteness at the goal of it. Even the "roughnecks" of the class can take literature now and appreciate it; it can be thought of in terms of a job. And even the "highbrows" may ask, Why study Milton and Matthew Arnold when one can take a literary course breathing the very life of one's own day? Read O. Henry and the O'Brien annuals, learn the rules and become yourself an O. Henry with words to market "worth ten cents per." Why not? Jack London did it. He viewed with supreme contempt his teachers and his courses in English literature and went away and mastered the laws of modern writing all by himself. Had his professors, he sneered, been able to write stories that "Everybody's" would buy, they would have resigned their professorships and become well-paid literary men. To the dump with such professors and such sterile subjects! Studying Whittier and Ben Jonson gets you nowhere. It is the

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voice of the younger generation. Teachers scoff at it, yet everywhere they are heeding it.

To read the text-books prepared for these students is to be filled with impatience. Criticism of the short story has been for the most part shallow. Laws are laid down dogmatically as if the short-story "genre" was something radically different from all other literary forms. Poe in 1842 said nearly all that needs to be said about it: he gave some five or six suggestions, but practically all that Poe said had previously been said by Aristotle in his "Art of Poetry." Literary laws are for the most part universal, applying equally to all forms. Only one fundamental rule for the short story is actually imperative: *it must be short*. All the rest—unity, momentum, immediateness, and the like—are simply the inevitable accompaniments of shortness. There are, too, certain half-digested statements that have been passed parrot-like from text-book to text-book, as, for instance, that the short story is a distinctively American *invention*, like the electric light; that it has been an *evolution* through a century or more of American life; that it is a type which has flourished because of

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the American temperament: the tired business man after his strenuous day demands fiction that can be finished at a sitting, something that will "get" him at the first sentence, that will lead him on with vivacity and humor and cumulative power, and that suddenly will "get" him again at the end and leave him in a glow. From such material has grown the American short-story legend. But the short story has been neither an invention nor an evolution, nor has it been made abundant because of the tired business man. Shortened fiction in America has resulted, to be sure, from peculiarly American conditions, but nobody invented it as the electric light was invented; there has been no gradual step-by-step evolution—each decade better than the preceding until the present decade is the most perfect of all. It has been a haphazard result of unique American conditions. It has resulted from international copyright conditions and from the attendant multiplication of magazines; it has come out of the peculiar conditions of the puritanical contempt for fiction, of the rough conditions of the frontier with its unique materials for narrative, and of the

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American headlong temperament that writes in short dashes more characteristically than in long-drawn-out narratives patiently evolved. It has been obedient to the voice of fashion, some decades running to one variety of it and some to another; and it has been read for the most part by women—also a distinctively American result.

It is time to seek the sun. Whither have we drifted? What is the true latitude of the American short story?

II

That it is a literary form, just as in poetry the ballad is a literary form, is nowhere disputed now. It is evident that a single-number magazine story cannot be a novel, and, even though it be romantic, it cannot be a romance. Like the ballad it is a single stroke, a flash-light upon a single area of life yielding a single glimpse. There can be no study of life as a whole; there is no time for exploring complicated areas; and there can be no development in the characters. But this element of shortness brings difficulty. The novelist with

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twenty, or even twelve, magazine instalments at his command can ramble and explain and leisurely bring to life a whole neighborhood and years of time, but the short-story writer is limited at every point. To work without surplusage is one of the last accomplishments of the artist, and here he must pack a maximum of material into a minimum of space. To do it requires artifices that the more leisurely novelist need not consider. If one is forbidden lengthy exposition, one must get one's effects by suggestion, by subtle hints and nuances that lead the reader himself to complete pictures and assign consequences. Brevity demands perfection. The sonnet is a supremely difficult poetic form chiefly because it is so short that even the slightest defect can be detected at a glance. There is hardly a requirement laid down for the short story that is not also a requirement for longer forms of story-telling, but in the short story the requirements are all in the imperative mood. And here it may be noted that the late insistence in America upon faultless short-story technique has reacted upon the novel, shortening it and greatly improving its mechanical artistry. The short

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story has been the apprentice form for novelists, and one trained early in its rigid requirements becomes habitually impatient of prolixity. A study of our leading writers of fiction will reveal that almost without exception the short fiction came first and very often was the author's best product. The young writer finds it hard to secure a publisher. He is unknown, and his first work must be accepted on its face-value alone. Therefore, he expends exceeding care on his work. The story is returned again and again, and he rewrites it, sometimes months after its first creation. Gradually it becomes better and better until some magazine finds it worth publishing. Cable's "Old Creole Days" collection he never surpassed: and it was because he put more patient work and more carefully chosen material into the seven short stories than he did even into the great volume of the "Grandissimes" romance. Bret Harte never equaled his "Luck of Roaring Camp" volume; Charles Egbert Craddock in all her later work fell below the level of "In the Tennessee Mountains." It is useless to cite further examples. And the writers began with short stories simply

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because short stories were more marketable. A novel might require a year or more of hard work and if unmarketable a whole year had been lost. In the same time ten or twelve short stories might be written—ten or twelve chances. A few of them at least should succeed. Hence the short story may be called the apprentice form of fiction, a form, however, that many have adhered to after they have fully mastered the art.

III

That the short story has flourished peculiarly in America has been the result of causes that we may fairly call unique. No phase of American literary history is more interesting. It is worth lingering upon. Irving was the first American to write short prose pieces with distinction. All his early reading and all his literary ideals had come from the eighteenth century, and it was inevitable that his first attempts at writing should be modeled after Addison and Steele and Goldsmith. "Salmagundi" was a nineteenth-century "Spectator" or "Bee," over-spirited, perhaps, youth written on

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every page, yet nevertheless a periodical, a miscellany, a salmagundi—meat and pepper and salt and garlic and a dash of soothing oil. Brevity was the soul of it, and the literary form was largely narrative. Twelve years later its author found himself stranded in England without money and without a profession. Perforce he must turn to his pen, and his first thought was a periodical, another "Salmagundi." The result was "The Sketch-Book," a magazine miscellany—it was first issued as a periodical—made up of expository pieces and short narratives in various keys. The first number contained "Rip Van Winkle," which was hailed instantly as a classic.

The effect of "The Sketch-Book" upon American literature cannot be overestimated. It was the most widely influential literary production that America has ever produced. Its ingratiating style, and, more than all else, its tremendous English vogue, impressed greatly the new young group of writers that was just forming: Bryant, Prescott, Paulding, Dana, Sands, Everett, Kennedy, and, later, Hawthorne, Simms, Willis, Longfellow, and Poe. The era that followed was the era of

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"sketches." Everybody wrote them. Bryant wrote enough tales for a volume. Edward Everett and Prescott, and, later, Longfellow and Whittier and most of the women, all, indeed, who wrote at all, poured them out in abundance: tales sentimental and sad, legends, Indian and adventure yarns, ghost-stories, nutshell romances, all of them of the Irving variety. Opportunities, however, for publication were limited. Books of stories by unknown writers were not profitable in the period when the best current English books could be had without copyright expense; magazines were few and feeble, and the story columns of the weekly newspapers were limited and, even when gained, profitless to the author. Some printed collections of sketches at their own expense; others, like Dana and Prescott and Kennedy, issued "Salmagundi" periodicals; still others, like Hawthorne and Poe, contributed perforce their earliest work to the weekly newspapers.

At this critical moment there came from Germany by way of England the annual, or gift-book: the "Atlantic Souvenir," 1826, the first volume, then "The Token," "The Legendary," and the like,

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miscellanies of prose and verse that soon became so popular that they dominated the book-stands of America. The enormous success of the annual enabled it to pay prices before unheard of. It became the outlet for the flood of sketch-book material that everywhere had been gathering. Much of Hawthorne's early work appeared first in "The Token," paid for at prices that lightened his discouragement and kept him toiling on in hope of final recognition. A new younger group was called out by the demands of the rapidly increasing tribe of "Souvenirs," "Irises," "Gems," and "Forget-me-nots." Then with the thirties came "Godey's Lady's Book," inspired by the success of the annuals and modeled after them in every respect save that it made its appearance monthly. Its success was phenomenal. Under the editorship of Sara Josepha Hale it achieved a vogue that has not been exceeded even by "The Ladies' Home Journal" of the present period. It paid what in its time were sensational prices, and it not only attracted to its columns the leading writers of its day but it gathered together a new and surprisingly large school of fiction writers, the most of them

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women. From the first the new journal insisted on stories that should be complete in each number. Readers, it declared, were angry if they had to wait a month to find out what happened to the heroine. Writers of fiction that could be sold were compelled, therefore, to furnish it in short pieces.

The success of "Godey's" called forth a swarm of popular magazines, "Peterson's," "Burton's," "Graham's," "Sartain's," and the like, all of them demanding fiction of magazine length. The three decades after 1830 may be called, so far as fiction is concerned, the period of the Irving-like sentimental "sketch," or the period of "Godey's Lady's Book" tales or short stories.

In English literature it was preëminently the period of the novel, the great era of Bulwer, Disraeli, Dickens, Kingsley, the Brontës, Thackeray, Eliot, Trollope, and Read, but America, during that period, produced few distinctive novels. Cooper because of his unique subject-matter, and later Mrs. Stowe, were able to make headway with novels but the lack of an international copyright law was for years an almost insuperable handicap to American novelists. Why buy American novels

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when English novels of the first rank could be had for nothing? Willis complained bitterly of the conditions that compelled him to abandon his unsalable novels, and break them into short tales for the magazines, "like the sculptor who made toys of the fragments of his unsalable Jupiter." The result was inevitable: American writers produced what they could sell, short magazine fiction, and a constantly increasing number of periodicals made more and more varied their market. Poe call the forties and the fifties the magazine period; he might have called it the period of short sentimental tales made for the magazine market. The result was a group of women writers of fiction in number unique up to that time in the history of literature.

The Civil War decreased the production of novels but not the flow of short stories. "The Atlantic Monthly," founded in 1857, produced a notable series of them by Hale, Mrs. Spofford, Mrs. Cooke, and Rebecca Harding Davis. Then shortly after the war came the most sensational literary success since "Uncle's Tom Cabin"—Bret Harte's California stories headed by "The Luck of

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Roaring Camp." Shortly afterward appeared Aldrich's "Marjorie Daw," Craddock's "In the Tennessee Mountains" sensation, and Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger?" All of these were short stories excitedly advertised and widely sold, and the new generation of writers, which was then gathering, learned early that the surest and most rapid road to success lay through the magazines and the production of short magazine forms *à la mode*. Everything from the first had conspired to make the short story the leading literary form for America. It was not an evolution but an inevitable result of American conditions during a century.

That it is a distinct *genre* with laws of its own was discovered by Poe in 1842 and discussed by him in what is really the first document in short-story criticism, his review of Hawthorne's "Twice-Told Tales." No one, however, seems to have read Poe's criticism, and no one, so far as I have been able to discover, was at all influenced by it. Up to comparatively recent times the short story was simply the *short* story; it was an abbreviated novel to be written as it author's caprice might

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direct. That a few, like Hawthorne and Poe, produced work that can be measured by modern rules came from the fact that they were artists enough unconsciously to apply with precision the laws fundamental to all literature.

The style of the story-telling changed from period to period after the changing fashions of the times, but aside from the fact that the nineteenth century, as it became more scientific, became more and more intolerant of surplusage and prolixity and more and more insistent upon vivacity of style and finesse in plot management, it cannot be said that the short-story form was an evolution—a steady progress from the crude toward the perfect. The classic specimens of the form lie in every decade of its history, and they live perhaps more abundantly in the earlier decades than in the later. The change from period to period was rather a change in fashion. The thirties and the forties, for instance, were sentimental and romantic; the fifties and the sixties took a turn toward the realistic; the seventies were influenced by Harte and Aldrich; the eighties splashed everything with local color; the nineties swung toward “veritism”; the

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new century, influenced by O. Henry, became enamored of technique; and just at present the "younger generation" seems to be breaking away from technique and straining after the strikingly original both in form and subject-matter, after the unusual and even the fantastic. Like every younger generation, too, it seems impatient of the old methods and the old forms and is loudly proclaiming that *now* the *truth* is to be told concerning human life, the *whole* truth and at any cost.

IV

Is the form worth the prominence that to-day the colleges and the schools are giving it? Are we to feel flattered when we hear it proclaimed that American literature is rich and original in its short stories, with perhaps implied inference that it is rich and original only at this point? Are the novel and the romance superior literary forms? Can life be viewed steadily and viewed whole if we are content to glimpse it only for the space of a *conte*? These are questions not to be easily answered. One may clear the way for a reply by

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pointing out that every one of the short-story writers has looked longingly at the novel and the romance as the goal of his ambition and has escaped to them at the first possible opportunity. Hawthorne is a case in point. Harte when once he had been recognized by the East turned joyfully to poetry and to a novel, his "Gabriel Conroy." But Harte's vein of pure metal was a thin one, how thin time has already proved, and he was forced to spend the rest of his literary life working what was not a bonanza lode but a limited placer bank, with here and there a nugget. Howells wrote no short stories till late in life for the simple reason that his connection with the "Atlantic" gave him from the first an outlet for his novels. James, however, was forced to serve his apprenticeship with magazine-lengths, and when at last he was able to market with certainty a full-length narrative he did so, though from time to time he made "short lengths" as caprice dictated. In his later years he declared that stepping from the short story to the novel was like stepping from a cockle-shell boat to the deck of a ship of the line.

But this does not answer the question. It is

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doubtful if it can be answered dogmatically. One may inquire in rebuttal, Is the lyric poem, which is a single cry from an individual soul, a form superior to the epic, which is a prolonged area of human action viewed objectively? Is the simple song which voices a single moment's mood inferior to the symphony which deals with many emotions and many characters, and shapes at last the complicated action to a conclusion? Is "Home, Sweet Home" inferior to the opera "Clari," of which it was a fragment? But in the short story we are forced to consider not only brevities, flash-light snaps at life, but briefly seen areas and individuals that can move us only for the moment, sensationally. We do not know these characters; they are strangers flashed a moment on the film and forever gone. Their tragedy affects us as the spectacle of an unknown man run over in a street-accident would affect us: a moment's thrill of horror; that is all. If it had been our brother or our son we should *feel* it. A novel, however, is an area of life large enough for more than mere momentary sensation. We are moved into a little neighborhood and permitted to live there until we

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know its small circle as we know our own friends; we have seen them grow and develop under stress of love or hate or suffering, and we have felt cause and effect and have had presented to us a philosophy of life; we have, indeed, if it has been a great novel. Such art grips and abides. We forget the short story just as we forget the movie we saw yesterday. It has made no deep impress; it has simply titillated us for the moment, and made us eager for another sensation. With the novel it is different. We do not forget Squire Western, or Becky Sharp, or Hester Prynne. Frank Norris set the utmost vogue of a short story at a month: "If very good, it will create a demand for another short story by the same author, but that particular contribution, the original one, is irretrievably and hopelessly dead."

It was a diagnosis of the literary disease America is suffering from to-day. Like Hamlet, our fiction has become "fat and scant of breath." The reading public is being fed with sensational fragments; brief narratives of strange localities, and strange individualities painted with exaggeration; brief tales with a gasp of surprise at the end; tales

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with breathless plot interest; swift anecdotes, vivid studies of sex adventure, sordid with realism—everywhere fragments, and the reader rushes from episode to episode as the motorist of to-day rushes through the landscape, or as the eye of the “movie fan” races from reel to reel. No more is there repose; no more is there life seen steadily and seen whole. The art of the short story, as it is now taught, is the art of securing instant returns with no thought beyond.

But an even graver charge may be brought against the short story, especially in its present fashion: it is “close-up stuff,” ephemeral in its subject-matter, woven of contemporary materials, unripened, unsubdued by time. Great art requires perspective. Hawthorne used the colonial period two centuries and more away from him, but even of this material he complained with bitterness. It was too brightly illuminated by the garish light of the present to work into the mellow finish his exquisite sense of art demanded. The writers, focused by O'Brien in his annual collections of the “best” short stories of the year and by the O. Henry award committee of the Society of Arts and

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Sciences, deal almost wholly with current newspaper material, the most of it drawn from the sordid and the sensational areas of life. O. Henry, the typical short-story writer of the period, was a member of the staff of a New York daily, and his work as a reporter was to secure one story each week from the current life of the city about him. The result was either highly entertaining vaudeville or else illustrative material for courses in social science or eugenics or psychology. It is impossible to throw upon such raw and undigested material any other light than that of journalism or of the movies or of the vaudeville stage or the scientific clinic; certainly it is impossible to throw over it the mellow light of great literature. It lacks perspective; it lacks soul. Walt Whitman is a great literary figure, not because of his earlier poems of the body, but because of his later discovery of "the passage to India," his glimpse of the immaterial soul of man.

And for the most part, though it is the leading form in an age demanding Truth, the short story is not true. It deals with selected characters, usually characters selected because of outstanding

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qualities, and it leaves the inference that these are types. In a coeducational college body of one thousand students, one couple, perhaps, every year will elope, a half-dozen men will frequent a gambling-house, two or three will be half-backs, twenty-five or thirty will be dropped for poor scholarship, and a dozen or so of the girls will be "flappers." These furnish the story-material possibilities of the college, and readers reading these stories conclude that this is college life. But the vast majority of the students are not gamblers at all or flappers or half-backs or "flunkers." Could a box of our short-story books reach Mars and the red planet from them make a study of our civilization, what would be the conclusion? It would be like material gathered by a photographer who selected carefully the subjects for his snap shots. Nowhere studies of the whole, but everywhere selected startling moments.

v

Shall the short story be offered as a course in schools and colleges? Yes, unquestionably, if it

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is taught with the proper focus by a teacher who knows literature. As a vehicle for conveying knowledge of the fundamental laws of composition and of literary art it has no superior. Its interesting content holds the attention of a class; its brief compass makes it easy to analyze; and its deft avoidance of prolixity and its constant demand for precise vocabulary set the learner early on the right path to mastery of composition. But let not the teacher exploit it as a wholly new form with unique laws rendering obsolete all literary laws up to the last decade, for all that the student's hand-book teaches concerning characterization and suggestion and dialogue and restraint and unity and much of the other literary qualities which the form demands has applied always and equally to all narrative be it in prose or poetry. And let him not lead his class to feel that he is teaching them the last word as to literature. Let the course be simply a course in composition, or a minor phase of literary history. The present tendency of students to be contemptuous of the past and to dismiss the great masters who have made the classics that are standard forever for the

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makers of the clever ephemera of to-day should be discouraged with all emphasis.

Should students be encouraged to enter college or correspondence-school short-story courses simply for possible financial ends? Most assuredly so, if they are told frankly that what they seek to acquire is not an art but a trade, and what they seek to produce is not literature but possibly salable journalistic copy. And it should be impressed upon them that as in every other branch of artistry the great masters have been exceedingly few and that there has not been one of them who was not born for his work and who acquired his wizard skill not from teachers and courses but from his own struggling soul.

THE OLD PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH: AN AUTOPSY

I

A MERICAN criticism moves by jumps: every decade a new *index damnatorum*. The old college professor, up to yesterday our solemn pride and chief intellectual glory, finds himself now assaulted fore and aft, swept off his aged feet, robbed of all his accumulated possessions of ages of reverence and authority, and then not only jeered at as a nincompoop, but held up as the chief weakness of our latter-day civilization. A cavalry charge upon cronies. It is as if some new literary parasite had been discovered, some intellectual corn-borer or boll-weevil had suddenly been detected at work on the green plant of American letters, and unless exterminated instantly it would ruin the whole crop. At first I laughed and enjoyed the grotesqueness of it. It was like hear-

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ing that your old grandmother was being suspected of banditry and mayhem. But the isolated shots grew gradually into a barrage.

The attack began, I thought, in the "Smart Set" sector, from a blue-devil battery intent on starting something, be it only conies. One gun of it was incessant, and it seemed to have the range: "The professor is nothing if not a maker of card-indexes; he must classify or be damned. His masterpiece is the dictum, 'it is excellent, but it is not a play.'" "Campus criticism"—the gun became overheated and burst into lurid fireworks. Other batteries took up the fire, all the way from Mr. Aldington—"If you wish to know who are the important living writers, read those who are attacked by the greatest number of professors"—and Irvin Cobb—"not a single good piece of writing that has not had every American professor against it"—down to such anonymous blasts as this in a late number of the New York "Evening Post" set off apparently in genuine wrath and real conviction:

Except when preparing his invariably worthless doctoral dissertation, and generally even then, he de-

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liberately prefers to read trash. . . . The professor is a puritan—a weak, wishy-washy, namby-pamby, snivelling son of Mrs. Grundy. He is therefore evil-minded. We all know that men who talk and write obscenity are clean-minded; in fact, the more obscenely they talk and write the more clean-minded they are. The man who suppresses his natural impulse to be smutty is, on the other hand, secretly and morbidly pornographic. So it is with the professor. His mind has become so clogged with evil thoughts that he shrinks from any frankly beautiful portrayal of the facts of life.

Surely it is time for the United States Senate to appoint an investigating committee to show up to the world the concealed yellow awfulness festering within these citadels of degeneration.

II

I took the thing into my Sabine study tremendously disturbed, for I am myself a professor of thirty years' standing, and the affair had become personal. And in the serenity of the place it changed its face. And again I laughed. When has the university and all of its equipment *not* been under fire? Is it not the age-old battle be-

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tween Greek and barbarian, Roman and Vandal, now translated into "highbrow" and "lowbrow"? Is it not largely a matter of definitions? What constitutes true value?

In thinking such a problem through I am helped always by asking myself this question, What was the reaction, if any, of the generation before, and what of the generation earlier still? Always will it be found that the modern instance is nothing new. Frank Norris two decades before the "Smart Set" era brought a ferocious indictment of the university system that had molded him: "Nine years—think of it—the best, the most important of a boy's life, given to devoted study! not of Men, not of Life, not of Realities, but of the books of other people, mere fatuous, unreasoned, pig-headed absorption of ideas at second hand"; and so on through a whole vitriolic paper in the New York "Critic." Norris certainly had a knack of stirring puddles. And before that, at least six years earlier than Norris's article, as I remember it, Jack London had dropped out of the University of California stating as his reason that it was a waste of

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his time to listen to men so feeble. This was his explanation:

I had to unlearn about everything that the teachers and professors of literature in the high school and university had taught me. I was very indignant about this at the time; though now I can understand it. They did not know the trick of successful writing in the years of 1895 and 1896. They knew all about "Snow-Bound" and "Sartor Resartus"; but the American editors of 1899 did not want such truck. They wanted the 1899 truck, and offered to pay so well for it that the teachers and professors of literature would have quit their jobs could they have supplied it.

Then there was Robert Frost who about the same time left an Eastern college because of the identical complaint, a desiccated English department. He could learn more, he believed, of real life and real literature in a cotton-mill even than in the medieval halls of a modern college.

The generation before Norris's and London's and Frost's, however, whatever they may have said of the college curriculum and the college administration, revered the professor. He was welcome in circles where even money was no

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passport. His students lifted their hats to him when they passed him on the campus, and they arose in a body when he entered his class-room. The New England "school" which furnished us with the chief "classics" of which we Americans may now boast, almost of all them were college men, and a considerable part of them were college professors, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Parkman heading the list. That there was weakness even in the Harvard of these classic professors we learn now from Henry Adams's volume, but the generation of Longfellow and Lowell as a whole brought little criticism. It thought it was sitting at the feet of masters. Presidents of the United States, like John Quincy Adams and William Taft, at the end of their terms thought it no descent in dignity to take a college chair, and great generals of armies like Robert E. Lee were of similar mind. Why this fierce modern outburst? Why this sudden bitter attack upon Gamaliel? What precipitated it?

The first indictment of the professor seems to be that he stands aloof from modern life. In an intensely practical age he deals with the impracti-

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cal and the useless. He is prone, it is charged, to live in the past, burrowing in the dust of obsolete volumes, making books out of books and not out of life. The indictment is well worth considering. That he is in great danger of this very thing every professor at some time in his life fully realizes. To dry up, to become a "fossil," to be left behind in the far past of his subject, is the Gehenna that yawns for every teacher. Longfellow in his first Harvard days found himself struggling, as every scholar sometime must do, with two forces, one drawing him into the dreamy past with its old books and old romance and old memories, and the other impelling him into the world of real men, "the living present," the tumultuous tide of life in the actual here and now. The "Psalm of Life" is a shell from that battle-field. Like Goethe, he sought as he entered upon manhood to shake himself free from the world of dreams that had bound him and to "be up and doing" in the world of action that was surging about his door. He made a spur of his pen and sought with it to goad himself out of the slough into which he felt himself falling.

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Trust no Future howe'er pleasant,
Let the dead past bury its dead;
Act,—act in the living Present,
Heart within, and God o'erhead.

His novel "Kavanagh" is the story of a college professor who fought this battle and in the end lost it, just as Longfellow himself finally lost it. It is the story of every college professor of the older type; though not all of them fight to a losing end.

It is this dreamy-eyed, unpractical type that has so aroused the young men's wrath. We of the older generation have awakened to find ourselves in an age that demands, as never before, everything in terms of the practical living present. Education now must have a definite finite object. I well remember my own first impact with the new order and the shock it gave me. It was two decades and more ago. The clerk of the faculty read the petition of a student who sought to be allowed to drop logic and substitute therefor a course in concrete structures; and it was granted. My training had been after the old academic manner, and it shocked me. I am no longer shocked. We are

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living in the concrete age. When a student comes to me now and says: "Lissun, Prof, how is this dope going to help a guy get a job and pull down a good salary? See?" I am obliged to answer him at length with definitions and specific instances, and, if I fail to convince him, as I always do, I am compelled to watch him change to concrete structures. Then when he comes back ten years later, with a salary that overtops mine by hundreds of dollars it may be, and announces with jocose familiarity and, I suspect, sense of superiority, and even pity, that dropping my "dope" was just about the wisest thing he ever did, I join him in his great laugh; but deep inside of me it hurts. The professor enters his own best-of-regulated classes now and finds them freely supplied with this new-school criticism which calls all professors nincompoops, "gelatinous asses," and pornographic perverts. And he attempts to teach them, knowing in his heart that there can be no real teaching of value without mutual definitions, mutual respect between teacher and pupil, mutual confidence, mutual desire for the best results possible.

To be sure, the old teacher defends himself

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against the misled young mob, hurling forth arguments that really are unanswerable. He deplores the depths of ignorance such attacks reveal. Youth works, he tells them truly, without perspective and without adequate scales of values. Youth is easily led to see only the concrete here and now, ignoring the things that really have foundations; and youth must be served and without delay, though all things really worth while, educational or otherwise, are of slow growth to be cultivated with patience. And, having delivered this, the professor goes on in seeming serenity with his lecture on the sounds of "k" in Chaucer's "Prologue." Yet the sneer all the same rankles in his heart. It is the sneer not alone of his students but of the whole modern age. If he is young enough and is really a man of power, he may startle the college some April day by resigning to "go into business with an old friend, who will furnish the money."

There are not so many of these dreamy old scholars in professorial ranks as once there were. The whole logic of college thought is now against

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them. To-day the professor must publish if he is to be promoted in rank and salary. The cry of deans and heads of departments is emphatic now: "Produce! Show the stuff that is in you by publishing!" and the implication inevitably follows: "Neglect this, and you lose your job. If you cannot put your college on the map with your publications, we must get somebody else who can." Thereupon every instructor plies frantically his pen. And right here comes the second indictment against the professor: All that he produces is of text-book quality—dry, didactic, uncreative, cocksure. If the professor essays criticism he is dogmatic, rule-bound, impervious to new ideas, dictatorial. He has lorded it so long over sophomores that he speaks as one infallible. No matter how brilliant he may have been at the start, his professorship has made him at last insufferable. Only recently I heard the latest book of one of the most vital of our younger critics mentioned by a modern editor with an ominous shake of the head. "He has remained too long in the professor's chair, I fear," he said. It was as if the doctor had pro-

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nounced the disease fatal: "He has remained too long in the tropics. It has permeated his system. No medicine can save him now."

III

Tilted in my Sabine chair, leagues away from the college Babel with its hundred-thousand-dollar "frat-houses," its million-dollar stadium, and its young barbarians all at play; with its budget-making Prex and magisterial deans, its blacksmith shops and soil analysis and concrete structures; with here and there a book, and here and there a lusty "professor" who once in high school possibly studied Latin grammar—tilted serenely thus, I saw both sides of the question. I remembered certain experiences in the days of my own preparation.

I remembered how I sat in a German university class-room five years before the war and listened for an hour to a lecture. [*"To lecture—To impart knowledge arrogantly with didactic intent."*—Johnson's "Dictionary."] The subject was the ending of "Romeo and Juliet" with deduced laws

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as to dramatic closes. The professor was the foremost authority in the world on the subject; at least, the Germans assured me he was. Certainly he talked like an authority; there was finality even in the cock of his spectacles. One felt that he had accumulated every possible scintilla of fact and fiction that ten grubbing generations of scholars had ever found in his narrow field and that he had sifted and weighed and arranged with infinite toil until at last he had wrung out the awful secret against the protest of all the gods that guard the Holy of Holies of Art, and for the first time in human history was able to display it to the world. The scalpel of science at last had found the soul of art; the fire at last had been brought from Olympus down to mortal men. And as he thundered forth the final formulæ and, radiant with victory, laid down law upon law for all endings dramatic, I felt like "Some lone watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken." Where was the cheer-leader? Certainly this was worth more than any mere football victory over Yale or even Harvard. I looked about the room: every one of the sixty-five was writing as if life

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depended on the securing of a verbatim copy. On not a single face was there a sign of animation or even of intelligence. They were sixty-five stenographers taking dictation. Why did the lecturer shout so? Why did he swing his arms? Why did he rather not send in a phonographic record or provide each one with a manifolded copy of the lecture, and save his time and theirs? Not one of them looked up; not one save me. I sat erect and took no notes.

What was he doing it for? Here was a man of undoubted ability who had given his life to the dissection of the dead body of literary art. Instead of becoming a creator of living things in a vital present, he had chosen to make a book by taking out of one book and putting into another, to reduce to laws the spontaneous inspiration of other men. Shakspeare molded his age; he studied no rules and mastered no science. He went into the open fields on an April morning and shouted in spontaneous outburst,

Hark! hark! the lark
At heaven's gate;

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and now comes the plodding scientist, with no spark of poetry in his soul, with his scalpel and test-tube and acids, intent on finding the fundamental laws governing the making of lark songs. Shakspeare threw himself into the currents of the life of his own day, or he never would have been Shakspeare; he lived, and he voiced his own living with no reference to the rules governing art; he made his dramas with a lively realization of his audience, which he knew from actual contact with it night after night. His plays were not written to be read, and certainly not to be studied in classrooms; they were written to be acted on the stage of the Globe Theater before the Elizabethan audiences that gathered to see them played. He thought not at all of Aristotle's and Quintilian's laws when he wrote "Hamlet"; he thought of the audience in the Globe Theater. To please it in all its varied strata, to hold its attention, to make it desirous to see yet another play from his pen—all this was to succeed. Not to do so was failure and ruin. And he succeeded to the full. And now comes the professor, the cold scientist with his scalpel, the man with no poetic imagination and no

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feeling for beauty, intent only on dissecting the dead body of his plays and exposing their muscles and nerves and bones. "Every art," said Taine, "ends in a science." Every active lion is followed by jackals.

But when one has worked out all the formulæ for making a Shaksperian play—what then? What of it? The Shaksperian play died with the generation for which Shakspeare wrote. His set of plays, voluminously "edited," emended as to text, commented on by a thousand critics, interpreted by the actors and actresses of ten generations, cut down and readapted to a theater the like of which even Shakspeare's wildest fancy could never have pictured, projected against a civilization as different from the Elizabethan as the sixteenth century is different from the twentieth—treated thus these plays are not *Shakspeare* any more than the great locomotive of to-day is Stevenson's. Shakspeare has become an elaborate composite, a myth. Every generation has added to it.

But why did the Teutonic professor lecture a whole semester on Shakspeare's art? That his class might themselves learn to be Shaksperes and

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write dramas? Then why was he himself, knowing as he did all the rules, not making "Romeo and Juliets" and "Hamlets" that the twenty-four universities of Germany could study and not be obliged to rely for lecture material on the work of an Englishman? Why such eagerness on the part of his students to secure every word he said? That they might themselves become dramatists and write "Romeo and Juliets"? Shakspeare has been taught intensively in Germany for more than a century, but where are the German Shaksperes? Did the few dramatists the nation produced in the nineteenth century learn their art from the professors? Not in the least. But why were these students so eager? That they might be able in later years when in the theater to understand all the artistry in the play produced? Not at all. They were simply and only gathering material which they might cram when the final examinations were upon them. But what was the aim of the university—beyond the final degree what? Was it fitting them to become lecturers in turn to other students?—a few of them undoubtedly would have to be drawn on to per-

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petuate scholarship in the university. But beyond this what? Why did the university consider the course worth while? These young men were going out to live, to rule Germany, to make German laws and conduct German business, and perhaps one or two of them to make German books of some variety or other. Undoubtedly they would all go to the theater, but one does not have to be a specialist on dramatic art to enjoy a play in the theater. It is doubtful if in all Shakspeare's audience there was even one dramatic critic, yet no audiences ever got more of Shakspeare than did they.

In the same German university the same semester I matriculated in a course described as "Seminar in Marlowe's Jew of Malta," a half-year given to a single play intensely studied by thirty men. Certainly from such a course one might be expected to emerge an authority not only on Marlowe but upon the whole age that produced him. I elected the course because for me there is in Marlowe's work something that thrills me at times more than anything else that came from the

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age of Elizabeth. Gladly would I live a half-year in the vibrant, spacious atmosphere of Christopher Marlowe—why did the seminar not read *all* of Marlowe's plays instead of only one? The class was on the two-hundredth line of the play when the course ended. Every separate word and phrase in the text of those two hundred lines had been subjected to the blowpipe and the test-tube and the whole battery of the reagents. I remember that for two mortal hours on a soft spring day when the *Schlüsselblumen* were springing everywhere in the forests beyond the Bismarck *Denkmal*, the thirty men in the stuffy little room brought out every possible gun in the Teutonic armory and turned it upon the phrase "go tell German Valdes." Why a manifestly Spanish name with the qualifying adjective "German"? Every man in the room shot forth his eager theory, documenting it by authority ancient and modern which he had accumulated after weeks of research in one of the best seminar libraries in the world, and the theories were greeted one by one with roars from the autocrat at the table-end: "Childish! puerile! sit down!

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sit down!" And yet his own theory, vouchsafed at the end of the period, seemed to me to be no whit less puerile.

And this was a course in literature; this was an "interpretation" of "Marlowe's mighty line"; this was the accurate measuring of a genius, the weighing of poetry that had burst from the flaming soul of a man whose imagination o'erleaped even the bounds of the planet itself. This cold-blooded dissection of a living classic as if it were a stinking cadaver, was this what poetry had descended into? If Marlowe's mighty shade was present in the room those long spring afternoons in 1909, and conscious of what was going on about that oaken table, then I wonder we were not interrupted more than once by roars of sepulchral laughter.

In each of the twenty-four German universities in the year 1909 there was at least one intensive semester course in Shakspeare and sometimes two or three; in each of the universities of Great Britain there was also a course; and there were from one to three in every American university and college. And it has been increasingly true since

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that date. Moreover, every American school-child during the past twenty years has studied critically at least one of Shakspeare's plays. Never has there been a generation so thoroughly read in the drama and so painstakingly schooled in dramatic technique, and never has there been a period when the whole world has been so barren of original dramatic creation. What has been the dominating dramatic production during these twenty years, and what is it now? The moving-picture melodrama and the slap-stick movie comedy. If our schools and colleges teach Shakspeare to create in their students appreciation of dramatic art, that appreciation chiefly is expended upon the movies. Decades of intensive study of dramatic art, and then the movie age. All the sentimentalism and melodrama and sensationalism of the mid-Victorian era have been mopped up by the movies, and the whole world is bathing in it nightly. Charlie Chaplin alone receives a salary that would have paid the salaries of all the actors in the world two centuries ago, and all even a century ago. And Charlie Chaplin is writing dramas; in an age

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following a century of intensive study of Shakspeare's technique Charlie Chaplin furnishes our dramatic art. Might it not be well, perhaps, if the professor of English literature ceased now and then in his talk about strong and weak endings in the Shakspeare prosody and gave courses in that small clear stream of living drama that a few struggling twentieth-century dramatists still are endeavoring to produce despite the movies?

Is the perspective of scholarship always to be a backward one over far distances? There came to me recollections of graduate study committees on which I had served, of oral examinations given to young men who had crammed diligently night and day for years on the deadeast of antiquities to the utter neglect of any literature as modern even as the American. I recalled a doctoral dissertation which had been done with incredible toil but which was sent back because not sufficiently documented, not furnished sufficiently with learned Teutonic foot-notes; and another dissertation rejected entirely because the writer had dared to be original and voice his own rather sensational opin-

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ion in opposition to noted scholars. Imagination had been savagely rebuked; lightness and tripping fancy had been frowned upon as from the devil. Another was refused because it touched a field not sufficiently "Academic." A subject to be suitable for a PH.D. thesis must be violently apart from modern life, must be from some ancient and thoroughly dead area of the field of scholarship. In few graduate schools until recently has American literature been looked upon as a subject for doctoral theses. It is too recent, too unacademic. I read recently the bulletins from a dozen universities in America and noted the thesis titles in the department of arts and letters, and then I reflected that in nearly every American college to-day possession of the PH.D. degree is imperatively demanded of every candidate for the title of full professor and even of assistant professor. I arose and paced the room. Might it not be well to reinforce the ranks of the young shooters of the "Smart Set" battery and to furnish them with bigger and better guns? Surely the old professor of English deserves all that Mencken and his gun-crew have given him—and more.

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IV

But in my Sabine study I am a philosopher, and a philosopher makes no snap shots. A journalist like Mencken is inclined to work without perspective; he sees only to-day and he sees it intensely. The philosopher examines the whole case. The chief attack upon the professor has been made by youth, and youth demands always instant and total revolution. Jack London in 1895 complained that the University of California taught all about Whittier and Carlyle, but nothing at all about the literature of the year 1895. And he left in disgust. But had he studied the matter at all he would have found that any American university which in 1895 taught all about Carlyle and Whittier was certainly an institution far ahead of its times; it was doing the most daring of pioneer work if it had courses that covered thoroughly Carlyle and Whittier.

To one who has never investigated the matter, it is really startling to find how recent a thing the study of literature in the English language has been in the universities of the whole English-

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speaking world. The graduate student of to-day, selecting his semester subjects from two or three closely printed catalogue pages of courses, does not realize that English literature as a college study is a thing almost literally of yesterday. As late as 1889, according to Churton Collins, there were in Oxford University "no less than eighteen chairs and readerships in languages maintained, and that at a cost of nearly seven hundred pounds a year, while literature as *belles lettres* and rhetoric was, if we except a few casual lectures delivered by the professor of poetry, absolutely unrepresented." What was true of Oxford was true also of the other British universities, and true also to a large degree of all the American colleges. Thomas R. Lounsbury, who was graduated in 1859, once told Brander Matthews that during his entire course at Yale "he never heard the name of any author of our language." William Cranston Lawton, who was graduated from Harvard in 1873, declared that "Dryden's political verse was the most modern 'literature' that the college touched" during the years of his undergraduate course. Not until after President Eliot's elective revolution of the

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mid-seventies did Harvard have a course in English literature as we understand the term to-day—literature taught not as philology, but as *belles lettres* with the background of history. As late as 1876 Dr. Child, who had been for years the whole English literature department of the college, if not at times the whole department of English, was offering in addition to philology only two courses in English literature, one dealing with Shakspeare's plays and the other centering about the work of Chaucer and Ben Jonson. Surely the generation of English professors just passing from the stage have lived through what can be described only as a revolution.

The history of literature in English considered as a university subject falls into three distinct periods: the era before the middle of the nineteenth century, when the old Greek and Latin course ruled the colleges to the exclusion of almost everything modern; the philology period, during which gradually Anglo-Saxon and early English became a recognized part of the college course to the extent that it added another scholar to the fac-

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ulty; and the modern period, which opened not far from the year 1890.

During the generation which ruled the philology period, German university methods of studying literature gradually took possession of the American colleges. The era produced on this side of the water a notable group of linguistic scholars of the type of Marsh, March, Child, and Price. It was a period that filled the files of the Modern Language Association, to quote the words of President Shepherd, with "an unbroken series of philological material, phonetic analysis, dialectic investigation, stressed or distressed vowels, characteristics of Pope's rhymes, laws of alliteration, etc., etc."

Criticism of this single method of studying English writings became a significant revolt during the eighteen-eighties, culminating, to be exact, in the year 1891, the year of Churton Collins's epochal book "The Study of English Literature; a Plea for Its Recognition and Organization at the Universities." "During the last five years," he began his preface, "an urgent appeal, in various

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forms and from various quarters, has been made to the universities to promote systematic instruction in literature as distinguished from philology, and particularly in our own literature." The English universities had been characteristically stubborn in their refusal to depart a single inch away from educational tradition. The most notable statesmen, *littérateurs*, poets—men of prominence in every field of English activity—were practically unanimous in their insistence that the English youth should be thoroughly schooled even to the end of his university course in his own great national classics, that literature should be "rescued from its present degrading vassalage to philology" and taught in the spirit in which it was first created, for its power, its beauty, and its bearings upon the problems of human life; but for a long time the universities yielded not at all. In the words of Collins, "Absolutely irresponsible, and completely autocratic, neither public opinion nor any form which authority from without can assume has been allowed the slightest weight in their councils."

Their refusal to admit the esthetic consideration

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of literature into the academic curriculum was based almost wholly upon the fact that it did not seem to adapt itself to the examination requirements upon which the whole foundation of the English university system rested. How could one examine a student in English literature which had been taught as *belles lettres*? "We cannot examine in taste and sympathies," argued Professor Freeman. "It is only the embryology of literature that has to be learnt," ruled Professor Earle. And the whole learned corporation was agreed that to elevate the subject into the university curriculum would be degrading to the university; it would be putting the academic crown upon a study non-academic; it had failed in the examination test. Manifestly an examination in English literature on the terms proposed would call forth from the student merely a regurgitation of the instructor's hobbies and prejudices and opinions upon the unchartable areas of esthetics.

America entered the debate with positiveness, siding for the most part with Collins. President Shepherd in the first number of "The Sewanee Review," 1892, made this sweeping statement:

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"There are scarcely two universities in America in which a comprehensive, catholic training in English literature is attainable or possible"—this in 1892—and he added that from his own student life in the University of Virginia he could not recall "a single shadowy reminiscence of esthetic hint, critical suggestion, culture flavor, or stylistic inspiration." His arraignment of the universities undoubtedly was too strong: America was giving far more English literature than was England, enough indeed even at that time to call forth German sneers. I well remember the tone in the voice of Herr Professor Morsbach in Göttingen when he told me, speaking of literature courses in America, "You do not educate your students over there: you entertain them." Yet in the main the statement of President Shepherd describes fairly well the conditions in America during the nineties. The influence of James Russell Lowell, who stood unqualifiedly for strong esthetic courses in English literature, and the strong influence of several leading university executives, like President Low and President Eliot, did much toward settling the question. The surrender came with suddenness,

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and that it was utter and unconditional is shown by the strong, broad courses in English literature that came with the new century into most of the leading colleges. Nothing in American educational history—in all its areas a most sensational field—has been more sensational than the growth of English departments everywhere during the last two decades.

v

This revolution won by the generation of English professors now just moving from the scene of action, the old professors of literature now under such hot fire from the younger generation, is best studied if we confine ourselves to a single angle of the battle-field, the subject of American literature, a minor phase of the English literature conflict but an intensely interesting one. Churton Collins and his English group had fought for the recognition of what they proudly termed "our own literature"; why should not Americans make a similar demand for their own literature—the literature of America? The question had its patriotic bearings;

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a kind of educational Monroe Doctrine was involved: for Americans American literature.

The term "American literature" was as old surely as the republic, perhaps older. Freneau had maintained that civil independence and literary independence go hand in hand. Nearly all of the prominent American writers at one time or another had discussed the matter. Longfellow in "Kavanagh" in 1849 had rejected the idea of American literary independence with scorn; but Lowell was inclined to be in favor of it. The question by no means was a new one. Even before the middle of the century two formal histories of American literature had been published: "Lectures on American Literature," 1829, by Samuel L. Knapp, a graduate of Dartmouth (I find no evidence that they were ever delivered as lectures), and Philarète Chasles's "Anglo-American Literature and Manners" delivered before the College of France and published in an English translation in 1852, a work that with strange modernness devotes the whole of one of its eight chapters to Herman Melville and his writings. In the forties had come Griswold's valuable collections, "Poets and

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Poetry of America," "Prose and Prose Writers of America," and "The Female Poets of America." Later, in 1856, was issued Duyckinck's "Cyclopædia of American Literature"; all of them volumes indispensable to the student of to-day. These, however, were sporadic products. The first systematic history of American literature in the modern sense did not come until 1878: Charles F. Richardson's "Primer of American Literature." During the same year were published three other pioneer books: Henry A. Beers's "A Century of American Literature"; W. J. Linton's "Poetry of America," published in London; and Moses Coit Tyler's exhaustive "History of American Literature, 1607-1765."

The reasons for this sudden renaissance of 1878 have been variously speculated upon. Tyler's volume had been widely advertised for several years before its appearance, and it had been suggestive to many. The explanation of Professor Beers in his preface is well worth consideration: "The retrospective turn given to American thought by the celebration of the Centennial year has stimulated an interest in the history of our own lit-

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erature." Certainly the eighties saw a most remarkable revival of interest in the national literature. With the passing of Emerson and Longfellow and later Whittier, Lowell, and Holmes, the nation seemed to awake to the fact that a great literary epoch had closed. There came a sudden interest in the lives and the writings of these men. It was the era of Riverside editions in many volumes, of the American Men of Letters Series, of "Nestoriana" in "The Atlantic Monthly" and elsewhere, of official biographies in two and three volumes. By 1896 twenty volumes had appeared dealing with the history of American prose and American poetry.

Charles F. Richardson's two-volume "History of American Literature," 1885, had been the first historical survey covering the whole field, and now following it came a flood of text-books. In the single year 1896 no less than seven of these books either were published or were announced by leading houses. Since then the number has gradually increased until to-day almost as much is written *about* American literature as there is produced literature to write about. Brander Matthews's

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"Introduction," 1896, which up to the present time has sold more than a quarter of a million of copies, seems thus far to have been the best-seller among all the text-books and critiques and histories.

At first the appeal was to the high school and the seminaries, which took with eagerness to the subject to the great delight of the text-book makers. Then came the almost imperceptible entry of the subject into the college courses as single authors considered in treatments of modern literature, then as mixed courses with such texts as Shaw's with American literature in the appendix, then with hybridized text-books such as Johnson's "English and American Literature." The first independent course, however, ever given in any American college, the first adequate course distinctively marked "American Literature," was offered in 1875 by Moses Coit Tyler in the University of Michigan.

Tyler was in every way a pioneer. He is the only one of the historians of American literature who has treated a distinct area of our literary history in a manner that may fairly be called definitive; he was the first to make the history of American literature a separate academic subject in an

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American university; and he was the first to study American literature against the background of American history. In his classes at Ann Arbor, according to the testimony of his students, it was hard sometimes to determine whether the subject they had just heard lectured upon was history or literature. The two volumes of the literary history of the Colonial period were first heard in literature class-rooms at Michigan; the two volumes of the literary history of the Revolution were first heard in the American history class-rooms at Cornell. When he accepted the Cornell professorship of history in 1881 he insisted that his title should be "Professor of American History and Literature," and while he offered no courses bearing the name "American Literature," he announced at the start that in all his courses he intended to "use American literature as a means of illustrating the several periods of American history." He was ahead of his times even for the new and radical Cornell. It was not till 1897 that his college caught up with him and added to its curriculum an unattached course in the history of American literature.

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The decade of the eighties was the period of the scattering pioneers. The few colleges which timidly divorced the subject from its English connections and made of it an independent course did so largely because of some dominating personality in their literature department who for one reason or another had become interested in the subject and desired to lecture upon it, often with the preparation of a text-book as a primary aim. In 1880 Kate Sanborn, daughter of the professor of *belles lettres* at Dartmouth, introduced a lecture course in the American authors at Smith; in 1883 Professor Richardson, the newly appointed successor of Professor Sanborn—he had been elected as the entire English department of the college—introduced at Dartmouth a three hours' senior course from which came two years later his "History of American Literature"; later in the same year, 1883, Professor J. C. Freeman began a similar course in the University of Wisconsin. Several of the women's colleges deserve credit as pioneers, notably Wellesley where Miss Hodgkins introduced a course in 1886, and Mount Holyoke where the first course was given in 1887. Undoubtedly there

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were other pioneers in the eighties; I have not attempted an exhaustive search.

At this point it was that a sudden squall threatened the young subject of American literature as a scholastic subject, and for a time it seemed like a veritable tempest. It came not at first, as one might suppose, as protest against the academic standing of American literature, for most of the older colleges had not even heard its timid knock at the doors of their literature departments; the protest came first as a criticism of the titles of the histories and the text-books. "American literature?—ridiculous!" In the first volume of "Poet Lore," 1889, Professor Felix Schelling of the University of Pennsylvania made this somewhat extreme definition: "The term 'American literature' can mean but one of two things: either it means such remnants of human thought as the industrious researches of archæologists amongst our aboriginal remains have been able to unearth, or, if applied to the literary efforts of European settlers in America, it is, as a term, equally applicable to the work of every American of foreign origin from Manitoba to the confines of Patagonia."

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Seven years later the fight was still on. In a long article which I published in the Chicago "Dial" in November, 1896, with the title "Is There an American Literature?" I said:

The increasing interest in our native writings has again brought into prominence an old question, one that has been discussed at intervals ever since Channing opened the debate in 1823: Have we an independent American Literature? Every volume thus far published upon our native literary products, including works by such authorities as Whipple, Underwood, Stedman, Tyler, Richardson, Julian Hawthorne, Brander Matthews, and Eugene Lawrence, and even by foreign critics like Professor Nichol of England and Professor Scherr of Germany has borne the title "American Literature," and has dealt with the evolution of the literature, its feeble beginnings, its infancy and youth, its first traces of individuality, its gradual attainment of strength, and its full maturity, thus in a way acknowledging it as a distinct growth.

It was as a protest against one of the more recent of these books that the Professor of English Literature in one of our leading universities remarked not long since, "I wish we might find some writer and publisher with the courage to entitle such a book *A History of English Literature in America*, the only expression for the thing which is not absolutely false and misleading." And a leading American review but yesterday, speaking of

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"what is called American literature," gave forth this dictum:

"Properly speaking there is no such thing, unless the pictorial scratchings of aborigines on stones and birch bark are to be classed as literary productions. Every piece of literary work done in the English language by a man or woman born to the use of it is a part of that noble whole which we call English literature, whether the author lives in Great Britain, the United States of America, the Dominion of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa. . . . Just so long as writers in the United States continue to express themselves in the language of Tennyson and Wordsworth, so long will their works belong to the same magnificent literature."

It is worth noting, perhaps, that an article even as insignificant as this one, published moreover in the Chicago of 1896, should have called forth a column-and-a-half editorial of angry refutation in the New York "Times" and should have deluged the professor who wrote it with sarcastic letters. So filled with dynamite was this question as late as 1896. No wonder that the colleges hesitated about admitting into their sacred curricula a subject so questionable. American literature, if it was a part of English literature, surely should be taught in the English literature courses. Some

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of us smile to-day. The battle has been so completely won now that many of the younger generation of American literature teachers even have never heard of it, and yet even now in certain intrenched corners of the old field the smoke of the battle still hovers. The oldest guard never surrenders.

One may say with positiveness that by 1900 American literature as an independent subject had been introduced into practically all of the American colleges. A few, among them Bates, Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, and Princeton, have never granted independence to our literature; a few more like Allegheny and Union, for example, held out until the World War, with its demands upon the colleges for patriotism-inciting subjects, added it to the curriculum. Averaging the years when it was first introduced into thirty of the leading colleges of the United States brings the year 1897. One may safely say, therefore, that American literature as an independent subject was introduced into the colleges of the United States about the year 1897.

The New England colleges may be taken as typical examples. At Harvard the first course was

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offered by Barrett Wendell in 1897, a class-room result undoubtedly of his having been chosen to write the American volume for Scribner's "Library of Literary History" series. His volume, which appeared in 1900 and which shrewdly cut the nomenclature knot with the title "A Literary History of America," set the seal of Harvard upon its subject and undoubtedly influenced many, Amherst, for instance, which now added a course with Wendell's text. At Yale, Professor Beers, now the dean of living professors of American literature, had conducted from the early eighties a course in modern literature in which a part of a term was set aside for the consideration of American writers, but the subject as a distinct and unattached course did not come until it was introduced by Professor Cook in 1892. In 1903 Professor Beers took up the work again, introducing a two hours' course extending through a year, with the title "New England Writers," and this he continued until 1914. American literature at Brown was introduced by Professor Bronson in 1892 and at Tufts by Professor Maulsby the same year. The University of Vermont recognized the subject in 1893, Am-

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herst in 1900, Boston University in 1901, Williams in 1903, and Trinity in 1906. Professor Winchester at Wesleyan felt the strength of the rising tide and yielded to it in 1904 to the extent of offering a seminar course for seniors to be given once in four years with the characteristic title "New England Literature." Averaging the introduction year of fourteen of the leading New England colleges brings the year 1893.

The Middle States seem to have been more conservative, the average of eleven leading colleges being 1903. Columbia took the lead, and perhaps to-day takes the lead, in American literature work. Her first course was introduced by Brander Matthews in 1891. Among the other colleges Colgate followed in 1892, Pennsylvania State in 1895, Lehigh in 1896, and the University of Pennsylvania in 1903, the last using the title "English Literature in the United States."

In the South the University of the South seems to have been the pioneer. Professor Greenough White, who was evolving his suggestive volume "The Philosophy of American Literature," was offering a course in American letters in the late

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eighties. In the West, after Michigan and Wisconsin, Leland Stanford deserves mention, since a course in American literature was in the first curriculum it ever offered, 1891, a course which later under the lamented Professor Newcomer became notable. Exhaustive one cannot be in the vast area of the West. Western Reserve introduced the subject in 1892, Oberlin in 1897, Adelbert in 1898, the University of California in 1899, and the University of Texas, using the characteristic title "Literature of the South," in 1900. These may be taken as typical colleges. The average year in the West, averaging twelve colleges, was 1893. In most of the larger state universities in the West, American literature has been a late subject to enter the English course, and on the whole it has received but scant attention.

It must be admitted that in all the colleges during the pioneer period the introduction of the subject has come largely because some member of the English department in some way became interested in it and had influence enough to secure what he desired. For example, the coming of Professor C. Alphonso Smith to the University of Virginia

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in 1909 as the Poe professor of English literature introduced into the curriculum at once three courses in American literature for seniors and one in Poe for graduate students. Examples of this kind might be multiplied.

Professor Smith indeed stands for the new type of American professor of literature. He believed in it; he not only introduced course after course in it in the conservative old University of Virginia, but he worked exhaustively in such modern fields as the art of O. Henry and the American short story. One of the latest letters that he ever wrote contained this hearty statement: "I am inclined to think that the colleges are coming gradually to the idea that while in purely artistic excellence English literature is superior to our own, our own is far superior to the literature of England as an expression of the vast implications of democratic citizenship. The moment one begins to think of citizenship as a worthy objective, our literature begins to be seen in its true proportions."

The astonishing growth of this single field during the past two or three decades should of itself disarm criticism. The flood once started has gone

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to extremes. More and more contemporary authors are made subjects of university courses. Within a year "The Novels of Hergesheimer" has been allowed as a dissertation subject in a leading university. Columbia has at least a dozen doctorate theses in process with subjects drawn from later phases of American literature. More and more current magazines are being introduced as text-books. Twenty-five years ago this attitude toward American literature would have been inconceivable.

That the colleges, entrenched behind a thousand years of conservatism, should have surrendered so completely in so short a period, is little less than amazing. It leads us to wonder if the foundations have not been too rudely shaken. Are our professors not yielding too much? Can education be democratized to such a degree as this with entire safety? Will the literature produced by an education that has a short backward look and little perspective, that uses as models pieces from last month's magazines, that uses the morning's paper as a text-book and places before the class poems by poets who themselves were college students the

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year before—can the literature that results from such training be other than ephemeral stuff? In all the colleges now, courses in contemporary literature; instead of text-books of poetry, the young poets themselves. Only a week ago I heard a proposition for a course in modern poetry to be taught by *all* the leading poets of the present—one poet imported each week during the entire year. If this can be done, why not a course in the modern novel given by actual writers of successful current fiction, and a course in the modern essay given by the editors of the leading literary magazines and reviews? As it is, the demand in the colleges is more and more insistent that the teacher of literature be himself a writer of literature, and that he teach along the lines of his own actual experience. Poetry must be taught by poets, fiction by novelists.

Let the bombardment cease. The old professor who taught with thoroughness an uncommercialized, unpopularized, unmodern phase of literature is swiftly dying out, if not already dead. He has gone down generally without surrender. A new race is taking his place. To-day PH. D. degrees

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may be earned even in the larger universities by a dissertation that is like an editorial in the morning's newspaper. An original play or novel will come soon as a dissertation subject, or even an original poem. And why not?

Cease firing.

VI

It is eminently fair always to estimate the value of an institution by the quality of its output. The measure of a flour-mill is its flour. The test of a college is its alumni. What has been the literary quality of the alumni of American colleges during the past three generations? The Emerson-Longfellow period of American literature was led by college-educated men. See Wendell's Volume. Aside from Whittier and the women who were debarred from college by the times, the whole New-England group was academic in its training. During the period of their education "English" as we know it to-day was not taught at all. The college course on its literary side consisted of Greek and Latin exclusively,—“the classics” drilled into the student by methods which may now fairly be called

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medieval. English the student learned through his Latin and Greek. It left him free to express himself at the dictates of his own individuality. It made for a highly individualized group of men—Hawthorne, Thoreau, Alcott, Henry James, Sr., Emerson, Theodore Parker, and the like.

The next generation of college men, sons of the Transcendentalists, were trained during the philology period when German methods had taken possession of the universities. They studied "English" and English literature taught as linguistics and philology and prosody—literature regarded as examination material. Whether as a result of this or not, the fact remains that the colleges for a generation ceased to furnish literary men. The sons of the Brahmins did not take their fathers' places, in the literary ranks. The period following the great period of the mid-century was the period of uncolleged writers. New England lost her leadership; her second generation of writers was a generation of women who wrote sentimental poetry and then sketches and short stories of domestic happenings during the New England decline. A non-collegian was imported from the

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Middle West to edit "The Atlantic Monthly"; an uncolleged California editor was imported to be its most highly paid "star" contributing editor; and a Mississippi pilot and Wild Western literary adventurer with not even a secondary education became its most vital contributor of serials and sketches. The all-college period had been followed by a non-college period; the pendulum had made a full swing. American literature during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was in the hands of these non-college graduates: Henry James, Mark Twain, Howells, Eggleston, T. B. Aldrich, Harte, Stedman, Stoddard, Whitman, Bayard Taylor, Joaquin Miller, Burroughs, Cable, Harris, Riley, Stockton, all of them trained outside of the New England environment.

And now a third literary generation is at work. The pendulum has swung back again—almost to the full extent. Why this modern attack upon the colleges as seed-beds of literary sterility? Consider the facts: the new writers who are making the new period have almost all of them been college-trained; have almost all of them been products of the period ushered in by Churton Collins

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and the other revolvers from the old Teutonic curriculum; have almost all of them learned to write in freshman "English" theme courses and in English and American literature class-rooms where literature was taught as a thing of esthetic beauty. Let the attackers cease firing. The sweeping changes brought about during the *fin de siècle* decade of the nineteenth century have become a revolution, and we now have reached a point where we may examine the output under the new régime.

Who are the poets of the younger school to-day? I will confine the list to those born after 1865. First, consider those with college training: Conrad Aiken, Hilda Doolittle Aldington, Stephen V. Benét, William Rose Benét, Witter Bynner, Grace Conkling, Adelaide Crapsey, Thomas A. Daly, Olive T. Dargan, Mary C. Davies, Arthur Ficke, John Gould Fletcher, Robert Frost, Arthur Guiterman, Joyce Kilmer, William E. Leonard, Vachel Lindsay, Percy Mackaye, Edgar Lee Masters, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John G. Neihardt, Josephine Peabody, Ernest Poole, Ezra Pound, Cale Young Rice, Edwin A. Robinson, Carl Sandburg, Lew Sarett, Alan Seeger, and John H. Wheel-

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ock. The list of those who have not attended college is shorter: Maxwell Bodenheim, Alter Brody, Arturo Giovanitti, Orrick Johns, Alfred Kreymborg, Amy Lowell, Don Marquis, Harriet Monroe, Sara Teasdale, Eunice Tietjens, Louis Untermeyer.

A list of prominent writers of fiction is necessarily longer. Again I exclude all born before 1865. These have attended college: George Ade, Mary Antin, Mary Austin, Josephine Daskam Bacon, Arthur Bullard, J. B. Cabell, Willa Cather, Winston Churchill, Sarah Cleghorn, Theodore Dreiser, Max Eastman, Dorothy C. Fisher, Zona Gale, Katharine F. Gerould, Fannie Gifford, Susan Glaspell, Herman Hagedorn, H. S. Harrison, Robert Herrick, Owen Johnson, Basil King, Jennette B. Lee, Sinclair Lewis, Jeannette Marks, George Barr McCutcheon, James Oppenheim, Ernest Poole, Upton Sinclair, Elsie Singmaster, W. D. Steele, Booth Tarkington, Elias Tobenkin, H. K. Webster, S. E. White, Ben Ames Williams, and Jesse Lynch Williams. The list of those who have not attended college is shorter: Sherwood Anderson, Irvin Cobb, Ellen Glasgow, Ben Hecht, Joseph

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Hergesheimer, Fannie Hurst, Mary Johnston, Joseph Lincoln, Meredith Nicholson, Kathleen Norris, Anne Sedgwick, Brand Whitlock, and Harold Bell Wright.

The essayists and critics have almost without exception been college men: Edwin Björkman, Van Wyck Brooks, Heywood Broun, Richard Burton, Samuel M. Crothers, Max Eastman, Walter P. Eaton, T. S. Eliot, John Erskine, Francis Hackett, Clayton Hamilton, Robert C. Holliday, Ludwig Lewisohn, Robert M. Lovett, Christopher Morley, George J. Nathan, William Lyon Phelps, Stuart P. Sherman, Simeon Strunsky, Carl Van Doren. And of the non-college group only Mencken; and Mencken was graduated at the Baltimore Polytechnique, which for all I know may be of collegiate grade.

The conclusion is obvious: American literature to-day is in the hands of college-educated men and women. The professor has molded the producers of it. Our most individual poets like Sandburg and Frost and Lindsay have been through the college régime; our most individual novelists like Miss Cather and Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis took

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courses in freshman English; and our most daring critics like Van Wyck Brooks, George J. Nathan, Heywood Broun, Simeon Strunsky, and Carl Van Doren learned their critical art at the professor's knee.

The criticism of the non-college men often is founded on envy or jealousy. The charge that campus criticism has almost invariably condemned the new books that are good is without perspective. Who can pick the good books from the current list and be dogmatic as to their future? Campus criticism has been based on conservative principles, and it has been cautious about proclaiming to the world that the new glittering pebble is pure gold. Before the judgment of the present generation of college critics can be proved faulty years must elapse. We can now begin to weigh Poe's critical estimates of the "literati" of his day in the light of Time's verdict, but when an Irvin Cobb declares that "not a single good piece of writing" has appeared during the whole of his experience which has not had every American professor against it, he simply shows his need of college training. Who is he that he is able to pro-

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nounce good these pieces the professors condemn? What qualities must a writing have to be pronounced "good" by Irvin Cobb? What will Time say of these pieces? Let him wait twenty-five years and then note who is right, he or the professors. "Good" to Irvin Cobb means instantly marketable and instantly acclaimed by the great average class of readers. The professors and Irvin Cobb are working with different sets of definitions.

Judged by its product, the colleges are equipped now with really effective teachers. The names of college professors are to be found now on the contents lists of more literary magazines than ever before in our literary history. The professor is writing novels and poetry and essays and short stories as well as learned dissertations. Even Mencken, the captain of the troop that has led the firing upon the campus pundits and "makers of horn-books for freshmen," has admitted to his new "American Mercury" five major articles by college professors each month. The most of our criticism is coming now from college-trained men, and much of the strongest of it is issuing from literature class-rooms. The tide has turned. More and

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more will it be demanded of the professor that if he is to be a teacher of literature he must himself be a producer of literature. And when this time is fully come it will mean raising to levels never before attained the whole mass of our American literature.

The old professor of English is dead. Cease firing; put on his grave gentle flowers, and pass on to new battle-fields.

A CALL FOR A HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

I

I HAVE nearly a hundred histories of American literature on my shelves, and I am still adding more—a hundred volumes to tell the story of our literary century, and all of them alike, all built upon the same model! I think I could dictate one to a stenographer in three days, with no reference to authorities save for dates: Colonial Period, Revolutionary Period, Knickerbocker Period, New England Period, and so on. Always there is the same list of authors, beginning with Captain John Smith, Anne Bradstreet, and Cotton Mather. A few are treated in chapters by themselves: Franklin, Irving, Bryant, Cooper, Emerson, Hawthorne, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes, Poe, Lowell, and, of late, Whitman and Mark Twain. The rest

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are assorted into groups according to chronology, geography, or literary forms.

But the really stereotyped thing about these histories is their critical method: always the same list of biographical facts with emphasis upon the picturesque, always the repetition of a standard series of well-worn myths. Irving is always genial and sunny, always loyal to his lost boyhood sweetheart, Matilda Hoffman—so loyal, indeed, that he mourns her in bachelorhood to the day of his death—inexpressibly touching! Poe is always first of all the drunkard; a gruesome genius, author of "The Raven" and "The Bells," a critic lashing his enemies and praising his worthless friends; finally, the maker of the most horrible tales in the whole range of American literature. Tenderly the myths settle over Longfellow and Whittier; not so tenderly over Cooper and Whitman.

Almost all of these histories are text-books. With the exception of John Nichol's now antiquated volume, which was written primarily for the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and the "The Cambridge History of American Literature,"

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which is not a history at all but a series of essays and bibliographies by a varied assortment of writers, and D. H. Lawrence's startling "Studies in Classical American Literature," all of them have been written with class-room intent. Even Tyler's volumes on the Colonial and Revolutionary periods were first put on paper as lectures to college students. Special purpose and provincial prejudice wave over every one of them like red flags. One may arrange their authors in groups. There is, first, the New England group, headed by the Victorian Charles Francis Richardson, and later by Barrett Wendell, whose bulky "Literary History of America" should have been entitled "A Literary History of Harvard University, with Incidental Glimpses of the Minor Writers of America." In every volume produced by this group the Transcendental Movement requires a full chapter, looming almost as large as the Reformation in European history. Often there is an additional chapter on "The New England Renaissance." Next comes a group of Southern histories, some of them frankly bearing the title, "Literature of the South."

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This region has always been peculiarly sensitive, peculiarly eager to make the most of its scanty literary annals. In all its books, Simms, Cooke, Timrod, Hayne, Lanier, and the after-the-war school of novelists (with scant mention of Cable) are made of major importance. Between the two extremes lies a belt stretching from Philadelphia and New York westward across the continent. Its text-books all present close-up treatments of local celebrities, and the space required for them is taken from the New England section. A history that does not devote adequate attention to Lew Wallace and Riley and Tarkington is berated by Indiana; one that neglects Eugene Field, William Vaughn Moody, and the new Illinois school of poets is scorned by Chicago; and to refuse major honors to Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, and O. Henry is to be unwelcome in California and the Southwest.

It is high time, I believe, for a history of *American* literature to be written, and I venture herewith to suggest the fundamental ten commandments for the making of it.

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II

First, it must be written primarily as a history, with no thought of class-room use. If professors *can* use it as a text-book, let them, but it must be as detached from class-room thinking as is D. H. Lawrence's amazing volume. It must not be academic and timid, and bound fast to old critical conceptions, but on the other hand it must not be primarily iconoclastic and revolutionary, with a devastating thesis to be defended, as was the case with Van Wyck Brooks's "The Ordeal of Mark Twain."

Second, it must be impartial and unprovincial. The writer must be completely free from sectional bias; he must be American rather than Eastern or Southern or Western. A foreigner might have the requisite detachment for the job, but he would hardly have enough understanding of the American soul, or sufficient knowledge of the whole mass of American writings. The Scotch John Nichol's "American Literature," the most detached history thus far published, falls fatally short at more than

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one vital point. The work that is wanted cannot be done by a New Englander unless he has been long resident in other sections of the United States, and it cannot be done by a Westerner or a Southerner who has not lived for some years in the New England environment. The writer will fail completely unless he is able to see his subject in the light of *all* America, from the beginning of the Colonial era.

Third, the new historian must adapt himself to the new perspective, and readjust the focus of all his optical apparatus, especially that part furnished by his academic training. We are still near the nineteenth century, in which lies the major part of our literary product, and by the old university standards nothing in that century is ready for final appraisal or even preliminary survey; nevertheless, a viewpoint gained by standing one quarter up the ladder of the new century certainly should furnish a perspective that will allow us to revise greatly the old charts. Large areas of our literary domain have not been changed as to boundary since the making of the first surveys, but we can see now over the underbrush, and the

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elevations are beginning to show their true heights. Is Bryant still, as of old, worth a whole chapter, or is he to be merely a part of the chapter treating of Halleck and Dana and Drake? Are Cooper and Poe and Whitman isolated and towering peaks or mere bluffs? Are the New England poets a mountain range or a group of foot-hills? We have seen of late a sudden change in the estimate of Melville; which valuation is right, the old or the new? Are there other variables in the American firmament? Has the time come to make a new chart?

Fourth, the myths must be stripped from our major writers, and they must be made to stand in the light of truth. Our critics and historians have been handicapped heretofore by want of materials, and quite naturally. It takes years for all the data about an author to be gathered and examined. We are not yet sure that we have found out, even now, all that is worth knowing about Shakspeare. He who is very near his subject is liable to be very far indeed from the ultimate truth. We still know only too little about our nineteenth-century writers. The families and friends of these men, in many cases, have felt that

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letters, journals, and the like were peculiarly precious, and have thus guarded them with vigilance. A literary executor has been appointed in each case, or an official biographer, and he commonly deems it incumbent upon him to create a myth, to surround his subject with a favoring atmosphere by making judicious selections from the mass before him, passing rapidly over the lean areas, lingering long over rich areas, and arranging the whole so that a well-rounded unity appears—a mythical figure that dominates all succeeding biographies. The life of Longfellow by his brother is three pots of honey, and Higginson's is a fourth. No adequate biography of the poet has yet appeared. To one who has read them all, he is a kind of hero of the romantic order seen dimly through an atmosphere uniformly mellow and vague, like a day of Indian summer—all harshness, all unpoetic reality lost in the dreamy haze. The papers and literary remains of Irving, Hawthorne, Emerson, Holmes, Whittier, Lowell, to name only major figures, all passed into the guardianship of their families or their friends, and no one has had access to them without strict super-

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vision. The only life that has been at all adequately studied is Poe's, and this study has been rendered possible by the fact that Poe had no family and no friends, and that his papers, with the curious exception of the guarded letters in the "Poe Shrine," have been from the first "in the public domain."

The case of Washington Irving may be taken as typical. Of late most of his papers and journals have been surrendered by his heirs to the auction-rooms, and at least three volumes of them have been published for the first time. As a result a new Irving is beginning to appear, an Irving seen without the aid of his nephew Pierre, and at times the figure is startlingly unfamiliar. It leads us to wonder what the story of American literature will look like when all the documents are fully in. The Irving papers, in Pierre's biography, were not only carefully chosen; they were actually tampered with. In his minutely kept Dresden journal Irving records minutely day by day his growing infatuation for Emily Foster. But his proposals of marriage—evidently there were two—are forbidden us, though they were recorded by Irving;

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for some hand, doubtless Pierre's, has gone through the diary and carefully erased the record of them—not enough, however, to conceal the fact that Emily rejected him at least twice. The pathetic story of the heartbroken bachelor disappears. Sentimental America, of course, should never know this, for it would shatter one of its cherished myths! Again, when recently the papers of John Howard Payne were found in Tunis they revealed one of the most remarkable love-stories in the history of our literature. The widow of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Godwin, became enamored of Irving and wished with her whole intense soul to marry him. She used Payne as a go-between and for a long time fully expected to be successful. Irving's side of the romance we do not know, for his letters we do not have, but certainly no woman expects daily that a man is about to propose to her without having, in some degree at least, been given cause. These instances I cite simply to show how little we really know about the actual life of some of our principal American writers.

But fresh material is appearing rapidly now.

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Emerson's and Thoreau's complete journals have been published; the Cooper family have disregarded ancestral wishes and published all the remaining papers of the novelist; practically all of Walt Whitman is now in sight; and there are promised new and revealing letters from others of the major group. The time seems propitious for the new historian.

III

His fifth commandment is that his survey must be written against the background of American history. Every author is a product of his times and is molded by his times. Longfellow is Longfellow because, in the words of Howells, "he accepted the sole conditions on which poetry at the time could embody itself." He but voiced the "contemporary mood."

Our literature between 1800 and 1870 had three distinct centers. First was Philadelphia, aristocratic, Anglocentric, utterly intolerant of the mob, holding with its "Port Folio," for the first quarter of the century at least, the literary leadership of

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America. To Dennie, its first dominating literary voice, American democracy was a thing utterly of the devil: "So far from courting the mob, our editors should treat the herd of swine and their feeders with the most ineffable contempt, and be satisfied with the general applause of scholars and gentlemen, men of honor and cavaliers." This was the voice of Philadelphia. To the north was Boston, the Edinburgh of literary America, righteous overmuch, intolerant, insulated, self-sufficient, contemptuous of all light literature, even to the ejecting of the frivolous N. P. Willis, who had dared to publish within the sacred bounds a journal wholly of this world—Boston with its ponderous "North American Review." Never has New England produced any novels of note save Hawthorne's and Mrs. Stowe's. Even "Uncle Tom's Cabin" could not have been written without the author's saving seventeen years in Ohio. "The Scarlet Letter" stole into New England furtively, from around the pulpit. Was it not in reality a moral tract? Always the novel has had to penetrate New England in disguise. Holmes's thin fiction sneaked in through his doctor's office;

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Ware's through his minister's study; Longfellow's from behind his professor's chair. Midway between Boston and Philadelphia was New York—cosmopolitan, tolerant, worldly. Light literature flourished from the first in its unpuritanical atmosphere. Boston would have smothered at birth both Irving and Cooper. Willis found a congenial atmosphere in Manhattan instantly, and so did Bryant and Halleck. There followed Stedman and Stoddard and the other exiles for whom the New England atmosphere was too thin and ozoneless. The new historian must treat these three diverse areas, not separately, as if he were dealing with three independent nations, but as parts that blend into a unity—early nineteenth-century America.

But he must go further. "Europe," declared Emerson in the mid-century, "extends to the Alleghanies." Cis-Alleghany America was, in those early days, a moon lighted by Europe. The Atlantic seaboard from the first had been in constant contact with the Old World. Those who read anything read English books and magazines and even newspapers. The ruling class was severely

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aristocratic. Of the first forty years of the Republic, thirty-two saw Virginia patricians ruling and eight the Adams family of Boston. Of the first six Presidents all but Washington had served at European courts. Before 1829 the East was democratic only in name. But trans-Alleghany America knew nothing of Europe, nor cared. The men of that vast empire were of the second wave of the American settlement; they had cut all Eastern ties when they crossed the mountains. The Atlantic could be crossed without great difficulty, but not so the land ocean that separated the East from the West. It was a barrier like a Chinese wall, and behind it grew up a wild new race of men to whom freedom was religion and self-dependence an axiom. They evolved a new outlook upon life, a new humor, a new conception of literature untouched by Europe. The East ignored them. Once during the Revolution the Atlantic cities became aware of them, when they burst over the mountains and fought the battle of King's Mountain, and again during the War of 1812 they made themselves felt at New Orleans. But it was not until 1829 that the East was really awakened by

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their war-whoop. Then it was that Jackson defeated the crown prince of the Adams family, the professor of rhetoric at Harvard College, and a new era began. No historian of American literature can blink the tremendous fact that the New England school of writers gathered and did its earliest work amid the shouting and the vulgarity of the reign of Andrew Jackson.

Unluckily, the formative thirties and forties have never been adequately studied. It was the age of the annuals, of "Godey's Lady's Book," of "Peterson's" and "Graham's." It was, to quote Hawthorne, the age of "a damned mob of scribbling women" that nearly drove all masculine men out of the literary field. One cannot understand Poe until one projects him against this background of sensibility and lurid adjectives. All of his earlier tales were blasts of satire; it is foolishness to weigh them in any other scales. His earlier criticism was vitriolic in its condemnation of the effeminate stuff of his day. His review of Fay's syrupy novel "Norman Leslie" is one of the most annihilating in our literature; it should be set up as a model in schools. He lashed Longfellow, the

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literary idol of the forties—the Longfellow who was writing, in 1840, "I have a great notion of working upon the *people's* feelings." He lashed him for writing poetry with books open about him rather than life. Poe has been fully justified in his criticism, though the voicing of it cost him the friendship of New England and made him an outcast.

The new historian will find the Civil War another vital fact in our literary history. Its greatest figure was another Western democrat risen from the mob. It destroyed New England as completely as it did the South. Two aristocracies simultaneously fell into ruins. Following it there flooded into the East a second wave of Western vulgarity, a new humor, a new literary form—the native type of short story—a new realism that scorned Europe and the East, a new poetry, the Pike County ballad, a blow in the face of the older makers of poetry. Then followed a debauch of dialect, local color, Rileyism, and literary lawlessness that shocked the old school into silence. The era of Mark Twain had dawned. Literature began to spring from life, from the people, from the

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spirit of the epoch. To separate it from its era and to neglect its background is completely to misunderstand it.

IV

Sixth, the new historian must struggle with the unsettled question as to whether or not literature is really possible in a democracy. The older historians, such as Richardson, defined it so as to exclude all save *belles-lettres*, the aristocratic area of the arts. Others, like Wendell, have viewed the field through the atmosphere of the college lecture-room. Higginson, writing on the rise of American literature, began his study with the founding of "The Atlantic Monthly"! The title of the new history should be "A Literary History of the American *People*." Such a history has never been written.

The literature of a nation flows always in at least two currents, the upper and the lower, the literary and the subliterary. In America there have really been three: the aristocratic with Richardson and Wendell as its recorders; the popular,

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touched very briefly by a few historians; and the submerged, totally unrecorded. At times the second current has been more evident than the clearer stream that should have been the dominating tide. It burst out with violence in the mid-century with its "Uncle Tom's Cabin," its Fanny Fern books, its "Wide, Wide World" and "Lamplighter," and Bonner's "Ledger." In the seventies it reappeared in J. G. Holland, E. P. Roe and Eggleston. Today we have as typical figures Harold Bell Wright and Zane Grey, subliterary but read by astonishing numbers. The third tide, that of the dime novels and the Bertha M. Clay sentimentality, the new historian cannot neglect. It has reëmerged of late in the moving picture and in the colored Sunday magazine of the daily papers. To dismiss this current as unimportant is to refuse to write the literary history of the American people. To study only the literature of aristocracy is to be ignorant of America, for America, taking all its elements together, is synonymous with vulgarity. Cooper, in 1838, wrote:

The tendency of democracies is, in all things, to mediocrity, since the tastes, knowledge and principles of

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the majority form the tribunal of appeal. This circumstance, while it certainly serves to elevate the average qualities of a nation, renders the introduction of a high standard difficult. Thus do we find in literature, the arts, architecture and in all acquired knowledge, a tendency in America to gravitate toward a common centre in this as in other things; lending a value and estimation to mediocrity that are not elsewhere given.

Cooper was an aristocrat, and he went down at last after a running fight with the vulgarity of democracy. What has been the effect of attempting to educate the *whole* American mass, to make the reading of books a universal accomplishment? It has raised to a certain degree the general level of the mass, but has it not done so by lowering all the upper levels? Our literature has gone *down* to the mass.

Seventh, the new historian must throw away all the older histories, with their Knickerbocker and New England periods, and find truer lines of cleavage. The Colonial period might be dismissed entirely, so far as its actual literary product is concerned, but it must be studied nevertheless with minuteness, since it was the crucible in which was evolved the America we know. Even more so was

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the epic period of the Revolution. Here for the first time we find really American writing, the beginnings of our original literature, scanty perhaps—too scanty, indeed, to justify Tyler's bulky volumes—yet nevertheless significant. And then came the first generation of the republic, 1790-1830, enormously important. It was the period of beginnings: of the earliest fiction—curiously enough, produced in Boston, and fiercely suppressed; of the feeble beginnings of criticism, never yet adequately studied; of national songs, volumes of them, culminating at last in "The Star-Spangled Banner"; of ebullient democracy held firmly in check by aristocracy; of fervid Fourth of July orations, hundreds of them cast into print; of American epics made to match Niagara and the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains; of the amazing sensations of "The Sketch-Book" and Cooper's "Spy"; of dreams of an independent American literature set forth in dozens of articles and Phi Beta Kappa orations. It was the seed-time, not the harvest.

Then followed the second generation of the republic—the period of tumultuous democracy—the

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era of Andrew Jackson, followed by the wild Tippecanoe, log cabin, and hard cider era. The mob was in the saddle, and unbridled individualism was king. In literature the period was opened by Knapp's "Lectures on American Literature," 1829, the first attempt at a history of our letters, and by "Godey's Lady's Book," 1830. It was the era of the annuals, over a thousand different titles; the era of embellishments sentimental beyond belief, of steel-engravings, and the Tom Moore-General Morris variety of gushing songs; the era of New England, transcendentalized; snobbish, absorbed in itself or looking eastward to Europe, journeying west only to deliver lyceum lectures for the culture of the barbarians, expending itself in abolitionism and fantastic reform—Alcott, Sumner, Emerson, Whitier; it was the period of spread-eagle oratory and Websterian eloquence; of the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas and Nebraska Bill, and the Dred Scott decision; the age of John Brown, and of the irrepressible conflict. Out of this maelstrom of vulgarity and passion and yearning came Poe and Whitman, Hawthorne and Holmes. Then with

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the sixties crashed the Civil War, and out of it issued a new America, as hot metal from the furnace ore.

Eighth, the new historian must be a literary critic of poise and acuteness, for if American literature has suffered from any single inadequateness that inadequateness has been in its criticism. Until recently we have had so few real authors that they have had praise out of all proportion to their worth. Poe was the only real critic during the mid-century; he stood alone. Longfellow and the New Englanders took his criticisms as brutal abuse and after a gentle protest ignored him as one ignores a pole-cat. To-day we realize that Poe was right. Applying modern measurements, we find the Harvard bard vastly shrunken where his own generation found him great. The new historian will strip away all his voluminous translations and all his elaborate dramas; he will throw into the discard most of the ballads of the "Tales of a Wayside Inn" variety, and leave him at last, possibly with "Evangeline," surely with "Hiawatha" and a few of the early ballads and lyrics, and unquestionably with the sonnets, which are one of

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the glories of American literature. Lowell, too, may fare hard at the hands of the new critic. His criticism, once ranked as America's best, is now seen to be intolerably smart and high-flown and over-ornate; his odes, with the exception of a few passages, no longer have any power; his once vaunted "Biglow Papers" must be turned into the department of history as "original sources," not poetry: and his list of lyrics grows shorter with every decade. A few of his essays may endure, perhaps—"Democracy" and "A Certain Condescension" and "Old Cambridge"—but no more. Lowell's influence was greater than his writings. He was a Janus figure caught midway between two generations and standing comfortably with neither.

The new literary historian must be fearless, undeterred by mere reverence, and influenced by no prejudice. Time has smoothed the way for him. Much that was proudly hailed by its first readers as pure gold already has gone the rubbish way to oblivion. Many historians still hold to that dead stuff, but the time has come when it must be cut away without reservation. Other critical prob-

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lems remain. The mighty influence of Scott down to 1830 must be weighed, and then that of Dickens; the place occupied by the drama must be ascertained, a subject thus far almost entirely ignored by literary historians; the curious use of the Indian in American poetry must be studied (at one time he was believed to be America's literary salvation!); and an inquiry must be made into the effect during most of the century of the lack of international copyright.

Ninth, the new history must show clearly the evolution and the spread of the American magazine, an institution peculiarly American and peculiarly influential in the development of our literature. Poe made it a central fact in his criticism, at least in his criticism of our prose. From the magazine emerged the American short story, the essay in many of its varieties, and to a certain extent that unique entity called American humor. Historians almost all have neglected this vital force.

Tenth and last, the new historian must be himself a writer of force and beauty, with a style simple and clear, able to master his multitudinous

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findings and bring them into appropriate compass, not in the dry-as-dust lecture form, but in chapters thoroughly readable. The task before him, obviously, is no easy one. Our literary growth has not been at all like that of most other nations: it has not been a steady growth from within outward; it has been rather the reverse. Our literature is a thing of shreds and patches. There was Longfellow in the thirties deliberately grafting us upon the decaying stub of the German *Sturm und Drang*; there was Irving who, instead of depicting our own *Sturm und Drang*, deliberately turned us to eighteenth-century English classicism and arabesque romance; there was Willis and all the other travelers turning our eyes constantly to picturesque Europe; and later there was Harte interpreting the California gold-mines in terms of Charles Dickens. The result of it all has been that our American literature is something different from anything else in the world.

IN THE HOSPITAL WARD

I

TO-MORROW comes the surgical operation, critical I fear. The hospital régime, working like a clock striking the hours, keeps my imagination keen. Nearer and nearer the fatal 8:30 A. M. when must fall the knife. The pit is narrowing with infernal precision; the pendulum is nearing with every swing, and there can be no interruption. Now a light meal, now no supper at all, now shaving of the affected part, now a disinfecting bandage. It is morning—to-day—six o'clock. No breakfast save a cup of tea. I am purged; I am bathed as for burial; I am clad in a surgical shirt split down the back for swift removal; I am painted with iodine; I am summoned by white-clad nurses, who in silence administer a hypodermic. I look about me for the priest; he must have been forgotten. A nurse on either

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hand, I march with brave show of courage to the lethal chamber—

To the theatre, a cockpit
Where they stretch you on a table.

I am covered with a white sheet; I am strapped fast by the knees and the elbows; I am anointed, I know not why, on the brow and temples with vaseline.

Then they bid you close your eyelids,
And they mask you with a napkin,
And the anæsthetic reaches
Hot and subtle through your being.

II

I wonder what book Henley read during those twenty-four hours preparatory. Certainly he had a book in his hand when they came with the hypodermic needle, just as I had one. What book from all the world's total would he have chosen could he have had his will? What book would you choose? You will tell me much about yourself if you answer. I will tell you by and by the book I was reading.

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That afternoon preparatory, as I stood at the hospital bookcase glancing along the titles, I had had a new sensation. Reading for me has been more or less of a profession; a book for me has been a thing to be analyzed, to be subjected to tests, to be used to explain an author or a period or a literary tendency. Books to the critic or to the literary historian are what rocks are to the geologist, substances to be assayed, classified, synthesized to recreate geologic eras. Books are fossils from the past of the race, records of perished yesterdays. I had been treating books as a scientist. Now it came over me that I was seeking a book because I needed a book to read—simply to read. Thought of to-morrow had cut away all ambition. "When a man can no longer look forward in imagination," says Amiel, "to five years, a year, a month, of free activity, when he is reduced to counting the hours, and to seeing in the coming night the threat of an unknown fate, it is plain he must give up art, science, and politics, and that he must be content to hold converse with himself, the one possibility which is his till the end." The books he reads now must be books

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indeed. Before such a test the yearly deluge from all the presses shrinks to one or two clear streams. Happy if there be even so many as that. The last book Amiel read, finishing it only shortly before he died, was not fiction, was not religious discussion, was not poetry: it was Mérimée's letters to Panizzi, the intimate outpouring of one human soul to another.

Why read at all? The thought came to me with force as I stood there by the bookcase. Why does the average American after dinner or whenever alone reach automatically for book or magazine just as he reaches for pipe or cigarette? Why two millions of copies and more of the "The Saturday Evening Post" every week? Why a hundred different magazines every month, and as many new novels? Why those endless thousands of newspapers in every city and every town twice every day? Why this modern mania for printer's ink and pulp-wood?

We read to learn, says Aristotle. "Among pleasures that of learning is the keenest." We are insatiably curious concerning others of our kind. We want to know how they have lived and joyed

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and suffered; what adventures they have had and what environments. Young life is eagerly curious to know; it reads to create its world. In the hospital bookcase I looked for a biography, or a journal—Amiel's, Emerson's, Thoreau's—a *journal intime*, a man's soul laid bare with no thought of an audience—but I found novels, and novels almost to the last one of them written not to convey knowledge but solely with commercial intent to bring sensation—housemaid novels, if the genus housemaid be not now extinct—dark secrets of high life written by should-be housemaids with no more real knowledge of high life than they have of revealed religion. Robert W. Chambers is only Bertha Clay with an education in French technique. To read sex novels for the knowledge conveyed is like going to the "movies" for one's history. If one is seeking sex knowledge let him go to the medical bookcase or the social science alcove. But I was not seeking knowledge as I stood there at the hospital shelf, and even if I were I should not have found it there. Modern fiction adds little to one's knowledge of life.

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Surely you are wrong, you say; modern fiction is realistic: it aims to hold the mirror up to life; it seeks only truth. "Main Street," you remind me, is not only realistic, it is veritistic, even naturalistic. All the same, it is not the truth. "Main Street" and the whole fictional group of which it is the type individual is the very synonym for untruth. It lacks perspective; it lacks totality of view; it lacks disinterestedness. It centers upon a single phase of small-town life and ignores all the others. It is like describing Australia wholly in terms of the kangaroo. "Main Street" is a series of carefully tinted cinema reels, a succession of glimpses—flashes into selected corners—sordid close-ups deliberately chosen—moving pictures made with intent to bring out but a single impression. Why should one read "Main Street," or any other novel that stages life rather than studies it, that starts with a thesis and rejects all data that do not advance this single postulate? What novel on the whole shelf of modern fiction could I choose for twenty-four hours of reading after which was to come the dark? How many novels in a year's

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output which compelled their creators, and which stand as genuine records alive with the vital wholeness and wholesomeness of life itself?

We read to share; that is the second theory as to reading. We read to become for the moment and the hour a living part of the *dramatis personæ* of our author's creation. "Sing for me, my Muse, the man, who, after the time of the destruction of Troy, surveyed the manners and cities of many men"; and we are off with the Muse surveying through our own eyes manners and cities and men as if vicariously a comrade of old Odysseus and his crew

On shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea.

If I sail abroad I choose with utmost care my vessel and my port, and if I voyage on wider seas of romantic abandon shall I not be equally circumspect as to my captain and my crew and my ultimate harbor? Conrad will I trust of the moderns, and at times Herman Melville, for they wrote compelled books out of full lives, but never Jack

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London or Robert Service and all the other mere makers of literary merchandise. I am fastidious as to my company at sea, and equally fastidious am I of my society on shore. Why should I enter the world created by Ben Hecht and Lawrence and become perforce intimate with those who in actual life I would avoid instinctively? The sex novel, for an instance, has but one single object, and that not Truth. Why read it? There can be but a single answer: one reads it to share in imagination the life of those depicted therein, to secure sensations which have been vicariously denied, to gratify a prurient curiosity, to make oneself informed as to latest manners in vicious living. The sex novel is for morbidly repressed women, for emasculate men, and for those thwarted creatures male and female who have passed the great divide of life and are consciously slipping down the hill beyond. One's true social position is revealed by the society one chooses during the hours of one's reading.

To old Horace reading was a moral exercise. In the epistle to Lollius he records that he has just reread the "Iliad," and to his eternal profit,

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for surely Homer "teaches more clearly and better than Chrysippus and Crantor what is honorable, what shameful, what profitable, what not so. . . . While you are young with an untainted mind imbibe instruction; apply yourself to the masters of morality." There was a row of Bibles and Testaments on one of the shelves. Evidently the benefactors of the hospital thought there might be a time for Bibles in a place of frequent mortal illness. Why was not the Bible the one book for my twenty-four hours? Unquestionably there is no other body of literature so complete, so genuine, so satisfying to one who would plumb the depths of human life, and at the same time so beautiful. Yet I passed it by in my search for a book. To fly desperately to the Bible in an hour of crisis or danger is sheer cowardice; it is superstition. After a lifetime of comradeship with the Bible, there is no desperate need of the book at the last hour. If I have read a portion daily in my Bible all my life I shall do so again to-day. Why should one's last conscious hours be different from any other conscious hours? To read feverishly all day

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in the Bible would be a sad confession. A lifetime without the book renders the book useless reading when life has been reduced to a single hour; a lifetime with the book makes reading unnecessary, for one has it then in his heart. Neither did I need a book of moral instruction. Even old Homer, had he by strange chance been on that hospital shelf, I should have rejected as moral instructions. Morals are for the young and for those who have life still to be formed.

We read to escape, says Keats, to free ourselves, be it but for a moment, from this world of "leadene-eyed despairs," from the deadly hospital atmosphere of life, from thoughts of death to come. It is not compulsory for us to "sit and hear each other groan." We may escape and without the aid of Bacchus and his pards—the material alcohols and opiates; we may escape; we may fly away on "the viewless wings of Poesy" to faery lands where always tender is the night and the Queen-Moon is on her throne. To William Morris this was literature's chief function—to create a garden of beauty and to bear the reader thither on moth-

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wing flights of fancy, to lead beyond the ivory gate and there escape the fever of life in sensuous imaginings:

Dreamer of dreams born out of my due time,
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
Telling a tale not too importunate
To those who in the sleepy region stay,
Lulled by the singer of an empty day.

To these dreamers of beauty, literature is a narcotic, an opium-dose, an escape from actuality into the world of amaranth and moly where always it is afternoon.

I glance along the hospital shelves—two hundred volumes which had been donated by generous benefactors for the use of such as I, the marooned by disease. What would hospital patients choose for reading could they have unrestricted choice? Suppose each patient had in all the years left behind him one book, the book he had deliberately chosen for his last hours before the operation. What would the hospital library be now? Not much different from what it is to-day, perhaps.

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I know what the hospital benefactors imagined such a library would be: novels, contemporary novels. Here were the best-sellers of twenty years, the *rejecta* undoubtedly from the "library" tables of many earnest readers who had striven to keep abreast of the literary times. When the book-pile had impressed them with its dust-accumulating powers they had sent it to the poor patients in the hospital and had been inscribed on the golden book of "benefactors." But all the books I saw were clearly beyond hospital aid—even beyond surgery; they should have been sent rather to the undertaker. Quintus Horatius Flaccus in the old Roman days had written the proper inscription for such volumes. For his own little book he had earnestly prayed that the fate of all best-sellers might not come to it, yet greatly had he feared: "You shall be caressed at Rome only till your youth be passed. When thumbled by the hands of the vulgar, you begin to grow dirty, either you in silence shall feed the groveling book-worms, or you shall be sent bound to Ilerda"—doubtless the Roman hospital.

What shall I choose, "The Heavenly Twins,"

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"Raffles," "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," "Soldiers of Fortune," or shall I jump over the years down to "Tarzan of the Apes"? Here is a handy set of modern detective stories—reading especially good for hospital patients; here, too, is a collection of Oppenheim—especially good since "he snatches you out of yourself"; and here are O. Henry and Zane Grey. Why not busy myself with this Vidoq vintage, "The Crystal Stopper," or this Cleek distillate, "The Scarlet Crawl"? Why not lose consciousness in this "Winning of Barbara Worth"? "Mr. Wright," says the "blurb" upon it, "is the most popular of living writers. His nine novels have had an average sale of 1,268,000 copies each." Why not join the procession? Why not climb the band-wagon and "be human"? Because I am to be anesthetized soon enough as it is, and I refuse preliminary dopings. I want a *book*.

There is another reason for reading. It is told that in a meeting of laborers during the Russian Revolution an old workman arose and prophesied that books and authors soon were to be things completely of the past, for in the Bolshevist age

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of gold that was just dawning upon the earth all the people would be so happy in their lives that "no longer would they need the consolation of reading." And I recall a recent statement of Benedetto Croce that during the tragic days of the World War he reread all of Goethe's works and gained deeper consolation and greater courage than he could have gained perhaps from any other writer. One may read then for consolation and courage. Precisely; it squared with my need. Sitting there in the hospital ward with the major operation but twenty-four hours away, what I needed was consolation and courage. I needed a *book*. "The Spoon River Anthology"? Mockery! "Slabs of the Sunburnt West"? Tinsel! "Main Street"? Village store gossip! I needed a *book*.

And just at that moment I found it. Just as I was turning from the bookcase growling that our literature was evolving into pulp-wood ephemera, mere journalizings to be scrapped at the day's end, I found my *book*. After twenty-five years in the hospital case it had never been opened; it was a first edition, donated soon after it was

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printed, and the leaves, save for a few in the first chapter, were all uncut. For a quarter of a century it had slumbered to be awakened by me. It was Eugene Field's "Love-Affairs of a Bibliomaniac." After twenty-four hours I had not finished it.

III

"A grotesque choice," I hear you say. Possibly; every book is a grotesque affair to somebody. But bear with me. A book that is a *book* must chord with the reader's harmonies and strengthen them; it must be simple, spontaneous, genuine—no forced growth; and it must be human at every point and alive. It must have esthetic values. It must be like a river—here with shallows that babble through green fields, here with deeps, here with breadth and sweep. It must be clear and unchecked, and it must have the repose and the unforced naturalness of art, "that repose which bespeaks the final triumph of the artist over his subject-matter." And it must have more than all this; it must have transcendental values.

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It must bring at moments illuminating glimpses of the world beyond itself; instants of vision when we may see more than the book and more than is contained in all its contents. The author may have held with extremest skill the mirror up to nature and have shown "virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"; but unless there be instants when like Alice we may see straight through the mirror into the soul of the man behind it, unless we have the feeling as we read that now and then we may catch as by a lightning-flash a revealing glimpse of the real man who is holding the mirror, the book falls short. Behind "Hamlet" I am seeking always William Shakspeare. At the turn of every wood-path Thoreau expected to come suddenly upon something that might flash to him, be it but an inkling, the Sphinx-guarded riddle of nature, the meaning of life. He walked on tiptoe always in eager expectancy. He knew the bird and animal life of New England as the farmer knows his own herds, and yet never a night that he did not hear some strange far cry in the woods that baffled

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his knowledge. He was not a naturalist; he was a supernaturalist. His search transcended the material; he sought to pierce straight through the obscuring mirror of realism and of naturalism into the mystic realms that lay hidden beyond. That is why I read Thoreau.

Eugene Field wrote "Love-Affairs" not at all for the market-place; he wrote it, as all real books have been written, for himself and the gods, just as Amiel wrote his journal, and Thoreau and Pepys. He had been sent home to die—a man in a hospital ward, as it were, waiting his hour like me, but, unlike me, with no illusions of hope. He had been sent to the death-house with indeterminate sentence, but the end he knew was inevitable and soon. And with a cheerfulness and courage only a philosopher could have summoned he called for his books, and with no master save the joy of working he wrote every day until he died. And from end to end of his book there is not a morbid note, not a caustic word, not a single outburst of bitterness. If you seek Eugene Field you will find him here. I know not where else.

The first chapter of the book he wrote near the

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first of September, 1895; the last instalment he completed some nine weeks later, November 2, two days before he died. His manuscript lay unfinished all about him that last morning. Had he lived another week there would have been a final chapter recording the last hours of his gentle old hero when by a miracle of good luck he was to secure the rarest of all the rare editions of Horace, the dream of his lifetime. And the last scene was to show the old man, Eugene himself in thinnest disguise, the precious volume clasped in his arms, dying hilariously with the light of victory in his eyes. For thus die all the saints; thus died Eugene Field.

Happy the man who all his life long has ridden furiously and joyously some harmless hobby. It will become his chief asset in the days when comfortings and cheer will be impossible to buy with money or even with friendship. And what hobby more joyous and more thrilling than the collecting of precious old volumes, the souls of the rarest of earth distilled into smallest room and made portable and permanent? Robert Southey in his last feebleness, his intellect all but

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gone, spent his days in his library touching lovingly one by one the backs of the precious books that once had been his whole life but which never more could he use again. Inexpressibly touching, yet happy man; even this poor solace saved him from utter darkness and the madhouse.

Sad perplexity has Field's little book brought to librarians. It has been skied remote in the zero corner of the stacks catalogued as "bibliography"; it has been classified as "essays," as "narrative," even as "humor." No one, so far as I have known, has given it its real place; it is autobiography. The soul of the book, like the soul of every genuine book, is autobiographic. By a thousand unconscious touches Field has painted his own portrait, he has psychoanalyzed his own soul and revealed it conclusively as undamaged. There emerges from the book fundamental and dominating that inflexible New England grandmother who had charge of his boyhood and who stamped herself indelibly upon him. She had planned his whole future as a dressmaker plans a garment with patterns and shears. He was to be a Congregational preacher mighty in the pul-

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pit; her own sons had failed her but now she had a second chance. Through all his boyhood Field had no dream of any other profession; but her death and the inheritance of her fortune toppled instantly the whole ministerial structure like an Eiffel Tower of cobs. He went to Europe, where the fortune vanished overnight, a part of it, by rarest fortune, spent in the book dens of London on unique old folios and quartos which he took with him to the West; lucky soul to have escaped New England after that Puritan boyhood! And he took them with him to Denver, the little pile growing gradually not as a rolling stone but as a rolling snowball, creating at last a habit and then a mania. "And then to Chicago"—perfect balance for a New England beginning—and the "Flats and Sharps" of a daily Chicago journal: whimsies, humor, columnings hilarious, poetry, pathos, parodies, Horatian echoes—that glorious salmagundi we call Eugene Field. But behind all the new Western lawlessness and exuberance and originality and ephemeral hilarity, the New England seriousness, the puritanic mysticism, the transcendental wild oats. It is like the all but unheard

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motif of sadness, the minor chord faintly suspected, through the resonant victory oratorio—the soul of the piece.

Most completely has Field revealed himself through his enthusiasms and through his loving treatment of his favorite volumes. A man is known by the books he gloats over and dies among. He loved Horace and loaded his shelves often at the expenditure of his last dollar. And, rare bird among the book collectors, he read the volumes he collected. His distillations from his hoarded Horace already have I analyzed; it is on my Sabine shelf. Let us test him at another critical point: he loved old Izaak Walton and owned as many "Complete Anglers" as thrifty fisherman own flies. And yet was he not a Waltonian after old Izaak's own soul. He was not a fisherman; he was of the tribe of Washington Irving, a "fender-fisherman"—illuminating touch. Let us sample him here; it will lay bare his soul. Angling and Walton's "Angler" are two distinct things, he argued. One may hate one and love the other; most people do. "I love the night and all the poetic influences of that quiet time, but I do not

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sit up all night in order to hear the nightingale or to contemplate the astounding glories of the heavens." "The best anglers in the world are those who do not catch fish . . . I am a fender-fisherman. With my shins toasting before a roaring fire, and with Judge Methuen at my side, I love to exploit the joys and the glories of angling."

Once, he records, he actually did go on a fishing-trip, and with his bookseller, a famous master of the angle; but when at last actually upon the stream "I produced my 'Newcastle Fisher's Garlands' from my basket and began to troll those spirited lines beginning

"Away wi' carking care and gloom"—

until the bookseller companion "gathered in his rod and tackle and declared there was no use trying to catch fish while Bedlam ran riot." But

as for me, I had a delightful time of it; I caught no fish to be sure: but what of that? I *could* have caught fish had I so desired. . . . Even my bookseller was compelled to admit ultimately that I was a worthy disciple of Walton, for when we had returned to the club house and had partaken of our supper I regaled

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the company with many a cheery tale and merry song which I had gathered from my books. Indeed, before I returned to the city I was elected an honorary member of the club by acclamation—not for the number of fish I had expiscated (for I did not catch one), but for that mastery of the science of angling and the literature and the traditions and the religion and the philosophy thereof which by the grace of the companionship of books, I had achieved.

From this single touch enough; why sample further? One gets from a book what one carries to a book, and one must carry much of the rarest things in the older literatures if one is to get the fullest values from this old collector's volume. I found joy in it and comfort, for every one of its many phases, like a perfectly adjusted gate-legged table, sat fairly upon the floor of life. When the nurse came at last with the hypodermic needle preparatory for the last scene, she found me at page 159 reading these words at the chapter close:

That was the Springtime, Captivity Waite; anon came summer, with all its exuberant glory; and presently the cheery autumn stole upon me. And now it is the winter-time, and under the snows lie buried many

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a sweet, fair thing I cherished once. I am aweary and will rest a little while; lie thou there, my pen, for a dream—a pleasant dream—callesth me away. I shall see those distant hills again, and the homestead under the elms; the old associations and the old influences shall be round about me, and a child shall lead me and we shall go through green pastures and by still waters. And, O my pen, it shall be the springtime again.

IV

“Sentimentalism! Tommy-rot!” I hear a hundred young voices. “We have outgrown all that!” But have we? Since Flaubert and Zola sentimentalism has been the devil of the younger school; their cry has been to quarantine literature from it as if it were a literary black death. The whole age of Tennyson is swept away now with a sneer—mid-Victorian, sentimental mush! But what is sentimentalism? Is it romantic love of the “St. Elmo” type? Is it Christian dreaming of the world beyond this world? Is it the deathbed scene of Little Nell or Little Eva? Is it “tears, idle tears—from thinking of the days that are no more”? Is it the long athletic kiss at the end

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of the final reel? Just what is this deadly sentimentalism, this "mid-Victorian" blight that is liable at any moment to blast the leaves of a poem or a book?

Sentimentalism, says my neighbor Ackerman, is self-pity. It is the whining and fawning of the whipped dog; it is the sudden realization of one's possible ills through an imagined life made more vivid than reality. The line that divides it from pathos, he declares, is the line where stands the single ego. And he attempts to make it clear to me by recalling the Adah Menken of years ago who adopted her husband's religion and wrote a volume of poems on the tragedy of the Jew. Comparison of these lyrics with the genuine outbursts of Emma Lazarus, the Jewess born, proves, he declares, his point. "In the case of the actress, the singer sees in the sorrows of the chosen people only a reflection of her own, while in that of the later singer, the individual is effaced in the tribe—her own fate is forgotten in the destiny of the race." One is sentimentalism, the other pathos. The inscription, he declares, which later Adah Menken ordered placed on her tombstone in Paris,

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"Thou knowest," is purest sentimentalism—a bid for the totality of mankind to dissolve in tears for an individual—emotional selfishness.

Ingenious, but to me sentimentalism, any outburst of the emotions, is to be tested by its genuineness. If it is a manufactured thing for effect,—sentimentality—like so much of the cinema stuff of to-day, it is to be condemned. Most decidedly should it be regulated by reason, restrained—nothing too much; never should it be allowed lawlessness to the bounds of sentimentality. But why check genuine emotion; why condemn as feebleness that within us that differentiates us from the beasts? Why check "tears, idle tears"? Why blast the maiden's dream of romantic love? Why sneer at the bedside of Little Nell? Why not weep over the sad tale of Enoch Arden? Nothing can be more human. Yet Plato was so afraid of the emotions that he would admit no poetry at all into his republic save hymns to the gods and panegyrics on the good. "For if you determine to admit the highly-seasoned muse of lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will have sovereign power in your state, instead of law and those prin-

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ciples which, by the general consent of all time, are most conformable to reason." Good only in a savage republic of Spartans or of Athenian stoics. Again I say, why kill the sensibilities? The race is incurably sentimental; why try to cure it? Why not join in the chorus of humanity as it sings "Annie Laurie" or "Ben Bolt":

In the old churchyard in the valley, Ben Bolt,
In a corner obscure and alone,
They have fitted a slab of the granite so gray,
And sweet Alice lies under the stone?

An intensely human note; one who cannot feel it has not yet lived.

Longfellow's "Footsteps of the Angels" and "The Cross of Snow," Lowell's "The Herons of Elmwood," Emerson's "Threnody," Stedman's "The Undiscovered Country," Taylor's "Autumnal Musings," Eugene Field's "Little Boy Blue," and the passage I read just as the nurse came with the summons to the room of oblivion, all these are as genuine things as may be found in the whole range of the world's literature. They are of the very stuff of which our human lives are made.

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But the command now is: Be hard; let poetry deal only with the aspects of material beauty; let the novel seek to record only disillusion; love at base is only lust, marriage only a legal form easily dissolved and as frequently renewed as one's whim may rule, children annoying accidents to be sent early away to training schools for such nuisances, religion a mere outgrown superstition to laugh at. Whole areas of our novel to-day result from what I may call the hospital complex. As I sat there waiting my turn in the hospital routine, I was surrounded only by disease; all I heard was inquiries about disease; disease there was the normal condition. How many of our novelists to-day seem to consider the world a great hospital with disease, social, moral, physical, the normal condition!

To escape from all this to Eugene Field's little book, wholesome as mountain air, human in its emotions as the men of the elder world, unhurried, cheerful, courageous; facing the quick-coming dark without whining or shudder—to escape to this was like finding an atoll in a South Seas storm and running safely within where the palm-trees

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make a tiny horizon of beauty and all is peace
save the angry roar of the baffled ocean without.

v

One last word. Are the great calm, unhurried, spontaneous books all of them in the past? Has contemporary literature nothing that may be unreservedly praised? Is there no single volume of modern writ to which I might devote my last twenty-four hours in the hospital and, returning home in safety, add as a priceless possession to my Sabine shelf? Let me say quickly that there are many such, could I but find them. Alas, how few my hours for reading new books! I wish some critic, as infallible as old Time himself, could sift the golden few every year from the mountains of clay, two or three precious nuggets, perhaps, and lay them on my desk. They are lost in the avalanche of books, but surely they are there. Once in a while I find one, and the finding is joyous. I can quote with all my heart old Horace's dictum now hoary with two millenniums of years: "I am disgusted that anything should be found

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fault with, not because it is a lumpish composition or inelegant, but because it is modern; and that not a favorable allowance, but honor and rewards are demanded for the old writers. . . . If novelty had been detested by the Greeks as much as by us, what at this time would there have been ancient?" True, indeed, but the books of the past are sifted wheat, and the books that are books indeed to-day lie hidden in veritable mountains of chaff. It is the task of the true critic to winnow this chaff swiftly into obliivion and to bring forth in whatever measure it is possible the true wheat of the year.

Of late, I confess it, I have been looking for this wheat not among the poetry, and not among the amazingly multiplied creations of fiction. I find that the books that appeal to me as I stand at the bookseller's stall and the books that I find myself buying, two to one of any other kind, are contemporary essays.

The age will be known, I confidently predict it, when a century of perspective has revealed the true nature of the weed-growth of our fiction, as the age of the essay, a renaissance of the eight-

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eenth century, an age of unhurried and familiar and critical prose distinguished for its depth and beauty after the fictional debauch of a whole generation. Devoutly is it to be hoped for.

I have my own theory as to why such development has come. The history of the novel during a century and a half has been the history of a shortening unit. From three volumes in the days of Scott and his contemporaries, it shrank to two volumes in the days of Hawthorne, and to one volume in the later days of Howells. Then came the still more shrunken form of the short story, eight or ten pieces of fiction within a single volume. By the opening of the twentieth century this tiny fictional unit had an enormous vogue. The stream, which had been narrowing for a century suddenly spread out into the ten thousand tiny creeks and coves and bayous of a vast swamp, well nigh losing its identity. The age of O. Henry, the age of the short story, had arrived. It is still with us; "Harper's Magazine" in a series of contests offers more for a single one of its prize-winning short stories than the great Victorian novelists received for the three-volume novels

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they wrote, some of them classics. Mrs. Wharton in a single month issues, instead of a novel, four distinct volumes, each simply a lengthened chapter.

Why this sensational shortening of the fictional unit? There are many reasons, but the latest and most imperious demand has come from the new short-story technique. Our novels are shrinking because our later novelists learned their "art" in the rigorous school of the short story. The literary novice has it impressed upon him from the moment when he can first hold a pen that he must begin with short lengths if he wishes to market his wares and that in writing them he must avoid surplusage as he would contagion. He must cut from his work without pity all description that does not inhere in the strict unity of his tale, all exposition save that imperatively demanded, all grace notes and all dainty devices that make only for what the older writers used to denominate "style." When after a long apprenticeship he has made himself marketable with his short stories, he usually essays a novel, but his short-story "art" goes with him now as a habit: he avoids instinctly

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surplusage and "style." Our novels have become shorter and shorter, and balder and balder, even to the baldness of Dreiser.

An unforeseen by-product has resulted. Style and expository art and the beauties of sheer description and of narrative divorced from the iron-bound necessity of reaching swiftly a *dénouement*, ejected from the short story and the novel, have betaken themselves to the essay. In this charming literary field the writer can even at this late age loiter, can wander aimlessly if he will, observing the beauties of the summer grass; he can be light or he can be profound; he can sit long in repose and elaborate upon his theme and even give to it, if he so desires, the colors and the graces of style. Stuart P. Sherman, to cite but a single modern instance, in his rambling volume "My Dear Cornelia" blends all the literary devices and literary forms into a delightful unity of independent units. In the older days his materials would have been worked into novel form; in later days they would have furnished half a dozen short stories; at the present time they become an unhurried series of familiar essays, work to live with and

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reread more than once for their charm and their wisdom. A volume by Agnes Repplier or Dr. Crothers; or, if one delights in criticism, by Brownell or Babbitt; or, for beauty of style, by Machen or Don Marquis, one might choose even to be the single book for comfort and delight during the swift hours before

They bear you in a basket
Like a carcase from the shambles
To the theatre, a cockpit
Where they stretch you on a table.

"Go, boy, and instantly annex this satire to the end of my book."



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